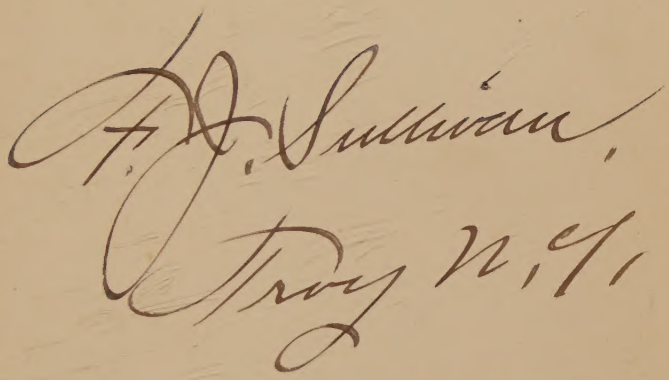
HOW TO WRITE LETTERS THAT WIN

247 VITAL POINTERS GATHERED FROM A STUDY OF 1200 ACTUAL LETTERS



HOW TO WRITE LETTERS THAT WIN

HOW TO BUILD BUSINESS LETTERS THAT COMMAND ATTENTION, STIR DESIRE, BRING ORDERS—HOW TO PUT THE PERSONAL TOUCH INTO A LETTER—HANDLING INQUIRIES, COMPLAINTS AND COLLECTIONS—ACTUAL LETTERS THAT HAVE BROUGHT RESULTS

247 VITAL POINTERS
GATHERED FROM A STUDY
OF 1200 ACTUAL LETTERS

NINTH EDITION

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SYSTEM
THE MAGAZINE OF BUSINESS

OTHER "HOW-BOOKS"

How to Increase Your Sales
How to Increase a Bank's Deposits
How to Systematize the Day's Work
How to Get More Out of Your Factory
How to Increase the Sales of a Store
How to Sell Real Estate at a Profit
How to Sell More Life Insurance
How to Sell More Fire Insurance
How to Write Letters that Win
How to Talk Business to Win
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Part I

WHAT YOU CAN MAKE YOUR LETTERS DO

Read the Rules

TWO kinds of letters cross every desk.

One—paper, ink and formality—goes the way of the waste basket.

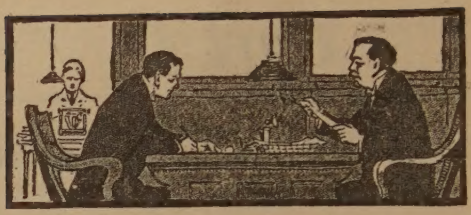
The other—logical, human appeal—draws the eye, grips, sways, convinces.

One is the product of careless routine; the other of conscious creation.

A strong letter springs from a mind's eye model, like the architect's drawing, the builder's bridge.

Make your letters magnetic—make them stand out—make them dominate each reader's morning mail.

You can do it—if you will master the principles, read the rules, put yourself into the work.



CHAPTER I

The Part the Letter Plays in Business

WHAT is the most important factor in the transaction of your business? What medium plays the greatest part in selling your goods, collecting your accounts, keeping you in touch with the other elements—concerns and individuals—that make your business possible? Run your mind up and down the essentials in your every day work and lay your mental finger upon the one most indispensable.

You can't miss it. It's the business letter.

The first claim on your attention each morning after you have hung up your hat and drawn a chair to your desk is the morning's mail. You run through it and you are back again in the hum of things. It has put you in touch with the run of your own affairs, just as your morning paper has laid before you a mental picture of what the world did yesterday.

Now you take your turn and you dispose of each of those letters as the purposes and policy of your business dictate. Through the medium of your replies and your own letters to others you buy and sell, you give directions, counsel and advice, you cover a thousand subjects—

you play the whole game of business over your own desk. And all through the medium of the business letter.

IF THERE has been one development in the last generation that has contributed more than any other to business growth it has been the development of the business letter. Letters—*right* letters—are no longer the mere stereotyped paper mediums of solicitation and acknowledgment. They are living, breathing personalities, with all the capabilities and characteristics of the men behind them.

Forty years ago the only letters that showed symptoms of red-blooded authorship were impassioned love missives and the opinionated chronicles of statesmanship. Then someone, somewhere, conceived the idea that human interest could be woven into a business letter as well as into a personal message, that a business letter, after all, *was* but a personal message and that it was possible to talk to a man a thousand miles away in the same words that you would use if he sat beside your desk.

That discovery, developed, has of itself dissolved distance and placed the inter-relationship of business men upon a basis of courtesy and intimacy that no other could accomplish. And more important, it has made possible the transaction of an enormous bulk of business at an insignificant fraction of what personal handling of it would have cost. Eighty-five million dollars in sales made by one house last year *entirely by mail*—that is a specific example of results.

As the possibilities of the business letter have been realized, it has leaped all the restricted boundaries of former usage. Today the letter—the *right* letter, remember—does whatever the personal representative can do. It sells goods, collects money, adjusts complaints,

carries on the routine of business with all the efficiency of the individual behind it.

USED rightly, it is, in many respects a better medium than a personal representative. Certainly it has all the advantage on cost. A sales letter entails no heavy traveling expenses, hotel bills and entertainment charges; a red stamp carries it the length of the land. Neither does it cool its heels in the outer office and conjure methods to reach the chief within; the courtesy of the mail lays it upon his desk. It follows up persistently when repeated personal calls would be impossible. It is a salesman that says no more and no less than the merchant or manufacturer desires. It makes no false representations, no verbal promises that cannot be lived up to. It is the perfect servant of the user.

But, you may say to all this, that you do not do business by mail. True, you may not conduct a mail order business. But you do have use for correspondence. You may sell your goods entirely through salesmen, yet there never was a sales force so good that it could not get more business with the help of letters from the house.

Correspondence as you use it may serve the simplest needs of routine—the acknowledgment of orders, the notification of shipments—yet there is never a letter goes out in your mail that does not have the possibilities of a business getting touch. If you stop with the acknowledgment or the notification, you miss an opportunity. Go beyond and *talk* to the man. Look at your letter through his eyes, shift yourself over into his attitude, consider what *you* would do if you got that letter. Do that a few times and you will soon be wondering why you didn't rub the machine finish off your correspondence long ago, take the man-to-man attitude and *talk* business

through the mail. There's a place for *real* letters in every business and yours is one of them.

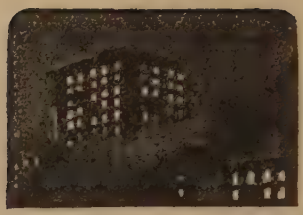
OR YOU say that you have tried the sales letter and it has failed. Do not indict the letter for its failure. Its possibilities are there. Indict yourself rather along with the hundreds of thousands of other business men who have neglected to make the most of a medium that waits to do service at a minimum of cost.

The business letter is the biggest opportunity for expansion that you have today. Employed intelligently, it will find you customers, it will sell your goods, or help your salesman to sell them, it will make your name known wherever mail service penetrates.

But the business winning letter must be the product of the most analytical thought. If it is to serve as a salesman it must be created with all the care that you would train a salesman before you would permit him to sell your goods. If your argument is to convince it must be planned logically, if your description is to paint a mental picture it must be clear, if your appeal for action is to get results it must be a real appeal with real inducement. You must know your reader's point of contact and aim your letters there.

Study *your* sales letters. Study every letter that goes out over your name. Does it play the part it should in your business? Give it a chance. The subsequent chapters of this book tell you how.

PERSONALITY is what marks one man among the thousands—what marks the letter we remember among the hundreds it is no effort to forget.



CHAPTER II

What a Letter Must Do—Its Elements and Contents

THERE are certain basic principles upon which every successful business letter must be built, certain invariable elements which it must contain. If it is to take the place of a salesman and do what a good salesman would do, it must follow a line of procedure in making a written sale just as a salesman does in making a verbal one. It must win for itself an audience with the man it is to sell, and once that is gained it must follow the steps of the sale exactly as the salesman does when he talks face to face with his prospect, leading him gradually, tactfully through certain definite processes up to the actual signing of the order.

For this reason every sentence and paragraph that goes into one of your letters should have a reason for being there. The sole aim of a letter is to get action and non-essentials simply detract from its directness. You have no time to write them nor has your prospect to read them.

It is the easiest thing in the world to write a letter that goes rambling from one topic to another without

getting anywhere in particular. But the good letter writer has a definite end in mind and he goes straight to it over a definite route.

Go about it to write a letter as you would to prepare an important speech. There are a thousand things you might say, but only ten are vital. Think of as many as you can to begin with, then sift them to the few. Confine yourself to those points and drive them home, knowing the effect that each should have and its relation to the end you want to reach.

CONSIDER now the good sales letter. It must proceed through certain steps. It must be based logically upon the principles of salesmanship. It must contain:

1. The opening, which wins the reader's attention and prompts him to go farther into the letter.

2. Description and explanation, which gain his interest by picturing the proposition in his mind.

3. Argument or proof, which creates desire for the article you have to sell by showing its value and advantages.

4. Persuasion, which draws the reader to your way of thinking by showing the adaptation of the article to his needs and his need of it now.

5. Inducement, which gives him a particular or extra reason for buying.

6. The climax or clincher, which makes it easy for the reader to order and prompts him to act at once.

These elements may be taken, in fact, not only as the basis for the successful sales letter but of every good business letter. For a collection letter is only a form of salesmanship on paper—you are selling your man a

settlement of his account. And a reply to a complaint is but another—you are selling your man satisfaction. Over the whole field of correspondence the same principle applies.

Of course the elements may not always appear in the exact order indicated, nor always in the same proportion, but they are there—they must be there if the letter is to carry the right impression to the reader's mind. A collection letter may consist largely of persuasion with a striking climax. The reply to a complaint letter may be principally explanation. The sales letter, naturally, follows the outline most closely; and as it has come to play by far the largest part in business correspondence it is the sales letter and its construction that should be given chief attention.

TAKE these elements up one by one and compare them with cross-sections of a good salesman's selling talk. You will be surprised to find how closely the parallelism follows and how simple a proposition it is to write a good business letter, after all, once you learn that it is merely a matter of *talking* to your man on paper.

First, you must get the attention of the reader. You may do this in a number of ways—by an opening sentence or paragraph, for instance, that arouses his curiosity, or by a striking statement that hits some one of his own problems, difficulties or desires. This initial interest on the part of the man addressed is absolutely essential to the success of the letter. No matter how well your proposition may be stated in the body of the letter, or how strong your close, your efforts will be lost if the opening does not start the man reading.

Following this attention-winning opening, the good letter runs directly into the description and explanation,

	Dear Sir:
Opening compelling attention	If this letter were printed on a ten dollar bill, it could scarcely be more valuable to you than the message it now contains.
Description and explanation—arousing interest	For it offers to place in the hands of a few large manufacturers, almost without cost, a copy of the greatest MANUFACTURER'S TEXT BOOK ever issued in America--a book that contains complete and specific office, sales and factory schemes for increasing a business like yours, a book that actually outlines in charted form over 30 factory and selling plans that have built up giant businesses.
Argument and proof—conviction	In one chapter alone in this book there is a cost system, all worked out, that saved one large concern $96,000 in factory expense in less than a single year. In another chapter the sales manager of a typewriter company gives a complete new system for managing a sales force. Yet these are only two out of 30 articles, all equally valuable.
Persuasion	It tells how to stir up and enthuse your sales force; how to keep factory costs; how to advertise, promote and market your articles; how, in fact, to cut down expenses and increase profits. It is a gold mine of business-building ideas.
Inducement	And remember, the book is free. To each of the first one thousand manufacturers subscribing to _____ we will send a cloth bound copy of this splendid 300 page book without charge. And even the magazine is no expense, for the $2 you pay for it will come back to you many times over before you have read one-half of the 12 issues.
Closing—climax and clincher	But you must act now--only 2700 copies of this book remain on hand and live manufacturers will snap up this offer. So pin your money to this letter and mail us today.
	Yours very truly,

Here is an actual letter, used by a magazine in getting subscriptions, that is almost a model in logically presenting every element of salesmanship. From the unusual opening that compels attention, straight through to the urgent close prompting immediate action, the reader finds himself almost unconsciously led step by step to an irresistible desire to buy.

which is planned to gain the reader's interest. This part must be above all specific. Every salesman knows the value of the actual demonstration—of having his goods on the ground, so that the prospect can see and feel and understand. As a letter writer you cannot show your goods, you must depend on description. Give your man a definite idea of what you have to offer. Picture the article, its use, its advantages so vividly that it swims before his mental eye.

But the reader must have proof of your statements. Proof or argument follows logically after explanation. Its object is to create desire. It is not enough to give your prospect an idea of the nature or make-up or working principles of the thing you are selling him. You must reinforce all these by arguments, proving to him the advantage of the purchase, the saving that he will effect in his business, the increased efficiency he can attain in his work, the pleasure he will derive from the article. Proof may be presented by showing the satisfaction which the article has given to other buyers or by some novel demonstration of its quality and value.

PERSUASION, on the heels of argument, intensifies desire. Here the reader must be shown tactfully how possession of the article will bring benefit to him personally. Possibly the best kind of persuasion is the subtle suggestion which pictures to the reader the satisfaction or actual gain which ownership would bring. Argument is giving a man evidence that will prompt him to act of his own volition. Persuasion is the added influence of the salesman's or the writer's personality that brings action when the man himself hesitates.

Then another thing which the letter as well as the salesman must do—offer a specific inducement. You know

how the clever salesman manipulates his talking points. Always he holds back till the last some extra reason why you should accept his proposition. This is the part that inducement plays in the letter. And it culminates in the climax or the clincher. As you hesitate, undecided whether or not to order, the shrewd salesman shoots at you one last advantage which he has held in reserve.

And, you will also recall, he follows it up immediately by placing before you an order blank ready for your signature. He has learned the secret of making it easy to order. And that is what you, too, must do in your business getting letter—follow up your last inducement and your "Act today" by giving the man something to sign—a post card, a coupon, something that is ready to return. Make it so plain to him what he is to do that there can be no possible misunderstanding. Say it in so many words—"You do this and we will do that." Aim to make your climax so direct, so strong and simple that the reader cannot resist the temptation to reply.

Give this contents outline application. Take, for example, the first letter in this chapter, an actual business letter that was successful in selling a great many books by mail. Note what an analysis of its make-up reveals, how it leads step by step to its striking climax.

Here attention is won through a striking opening assertion that must arouse the curiosity of any reader. But it runs in the very next sentence into explanation. Proof of the book's value is found in statements of what its plans have done for other concerns. The next paragraph persuades through suggesting what possession of the book would enable the buyer to do. Then follows inducement through offer of the book free as a premium. Finally the climax comes in the last urgent suggestion to act at once because the number is limited. And how

Commonplace opening

Stereotyped expressions

No argument

Does not actually interest

Prompts no action

Dear Sir:

We have been informed that you contemplate building a new factory and if so, we presume you will be in need of supplies.

We wish to advise you that we are headquarters for all kinds of power transmitting machinery and mill supplies and can furnish and erect entire equipments.

Enclosed find our 1909 catalogue. By glancing through this you can obtain some idea of our line.

If interested in these goods, we should be glad of an opportunity to quote you prices and are confident they will meet your approval.

Trusting you will let us have a share of your business and hoping we may hear from you at an early date, we are

Yours very truly,

Here is a typical sales letter, filled with stereotyped expressions and absolutely wanting in personality and real sales talk. It follows a commonplace form of general solicitation and would give no reader the impression that it was addressed to him personally.

As a whole the letter is purely commentary. It does not propose or offer one specific thing. The only positive statement in the entire letter is that a catalogue is enclosed. It does not interest the reader or arouse his desire. He has no reason for answering it.

The opening sentence lacks the directness necessary to win attention. There is too much "we" and not enough "you." Such expressions as "we notice," "no doubt" and "we desire to inform you" are superfluous and detract from directness.

It is a mistake to suggest that the reader "glance" through the catalogue. He should be asked to go over it carefully. Instead of soliciting an opportunity to quote discounts "if he is interested," the letter should actually win his interest by playing up some particular feature of quality, service or price and showing how the goods will meet his needs.

The close is simply the mildest suggestion, inspires no action and offers no inducement for the reader to answer.

Notice how the same proposition is handled in the rewritten letter:

The opening appeals directly to the reader's needs, compelling his attention. The second paragraph wins his interest by picturing an undesirable situation he may face and showing him how to avoid it.

My dear Mr. French:

Attention won

You will soon be wanting supplies for the new plant you are erecting.

Interest aroused by showing an understanding of the reader's needs

And you know what a trying proposition supply buying is when you have to obtain your equipment from a dozen different sources. There are sure to be some parts to go back for alterations; there will be delayed shipments on some goods that will hold up all. You have been saying to yourself how much quicker and easier and better you could put your plant in shape if you could get somewhere a complete equipment that would meet your needs.

Beginning argument

That is just what we are ready to install for you on an hour's notice--a complete equipment that will meet your most exacting demands--in economy of operation--in-day-in-and-day-out wearing quality.

Argument backed by proof in specific article and price cited

Explanation

Persuasion

And because we can furnish you with every item of equipment that you need, we can do it at a bed-rock minimum of cost to you. The catalogue enclosed is a perfect directory of plant equipment. Go over it very carefully. Note particularly the special prices quoted on "Star Brand" belting. This is made in our own factory from the very choicest oak tanned stock. In actual tests it has proved its ability to outwear three times over any other belting at the same price on the market. And this is just one item--just to give you an idea of the price and quality we could give you in furnishing your plant complete.

Prospect given something to sign

You simply cannot afford to buy a dollar's worth of supplies until you know our rock-bottom price for the entire equipment. Fill out and mail the enclosed specification blank today. Our prices and full particulars will come by return mail.

Very truly yours,

Next comes argument to arouse his desire by showing him the trouble and money he can save by ordering a complete equipment. Proof follows in citing a specific price and article. In the close he is urged to act at once and is offered inducement in service—complete prices and particulars by return mail. And he is given something to do at once, bringing the letter to a strong ending.

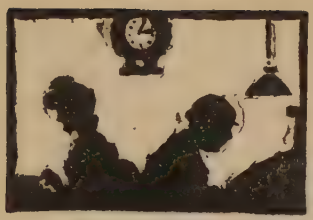
could ordering be made easier? Simply "pin your money to this letter and mail us today."

Of course not all letters have the elements marked off so clearly as this. An entirely different method of appeal may seem advisable. Judgment must depend upon your knowledge of what will win the reader's interest. But the finished letter contains, in some degree, every one of these elements. The only sure method of learning their functions, value and proper use, is to study each one individually. Then, with an appreciation of the effect of each upon the reader, you can build a balanced business letter that will bring results.

The New Sales Letter

EVERY new machine or process, every novel plan, scheme or principle, is a tool in the hands of today's success builder.

And the original thought, the paragraph or letter that abandons yesterday's formalities, that hits straight, that hews to the line of "you", is stone for tomorrow's tower of business.



CHAPTER III

The Make-up of a Business Letter

THE first estimate a business man makes of an unknown correspondent is based on the appearance of his letter. A business man who is familiar with the ordinary conventional forms of a letter, is quick to notice any departure from the accepted standards. His first impulse upon receiving a communication of unusual shape or arrangement is to criticize. It breaks away from the routine; it obtrudes itself upon his attention; it attracts his notice in the same way as a peculiar suit of clothes or a house of odd design, a unique table service or any other object of every-day familiarity and use that departs from the forms to which he has been accustomed.

It is undoubtedly true that on rare occasions the effects of such changes are pleasing. But it is also true that the generally observed forms, especially of business letters, have been accepted for certain well defined reasons after practical experimenting. He who adopts new standards should do so cautiously and for cause; otherwise he may expect the same criticism that falls to him who adopts the unusual in dress or manner.

For practical purposes, the size of a sheet of business stationery should be approximately 8 by 11 inches; even though it vary an inch or two, in either dimension, it should observe about these proportions. This size has been established by no single authority or group of authorities, and a correspondent may vary it as he will; a man once wrote a message on an oyster shell, stamped it, and the postal authorities, in the course of time, delivered it to the addressee. But the standard envelope is 3½ by 6½ inches in size, and a sheet about 8 by 11 inches folds into it very conveniently and is handled more quickly and safely by the post office than smaller envelopes that may get lost in the shuffle; the miscarriage of small, odd shaped envelopes used for sending out personal cards and announcements has caused more than one social *faux pas.*

Furthermore, a sheet of these proportions is convenient to handle and to file. And as business houses generally observe the safe and sane usage, envelopes and sheets of standard size and form are preferred to the oyster shell school of originality. For legal documents, manuscripts and other large sheets, larger envelopes, also of standard size, are provided.

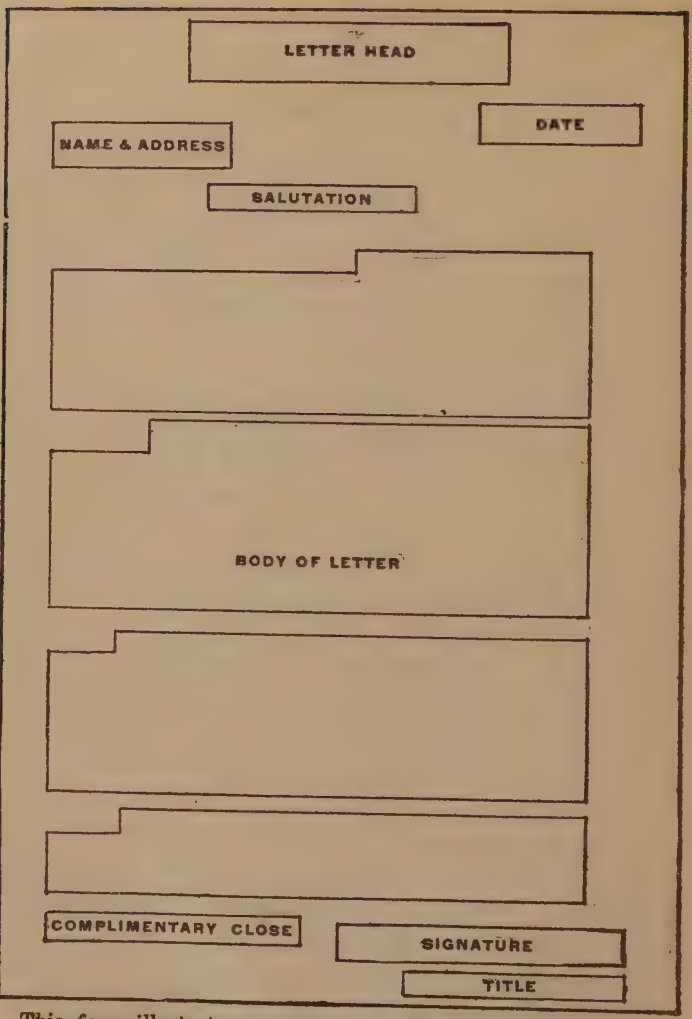
EVERY business letter should be written on business stationery—with a business letter head. It should be written on one side of the sheet only, and should be sent out in an envelope with the name and address of the sender printed, lithographed, engraved or otherwise clearly noted in the upper left corner, so that the official pointing-hand stamp of the postoffice, with the instructions "return to sender" may be affixed, in case of non-delivery, without causing undue annoyance as is some-

times occasioned by placing the return address on the back of the envelope or in some other unusual place.

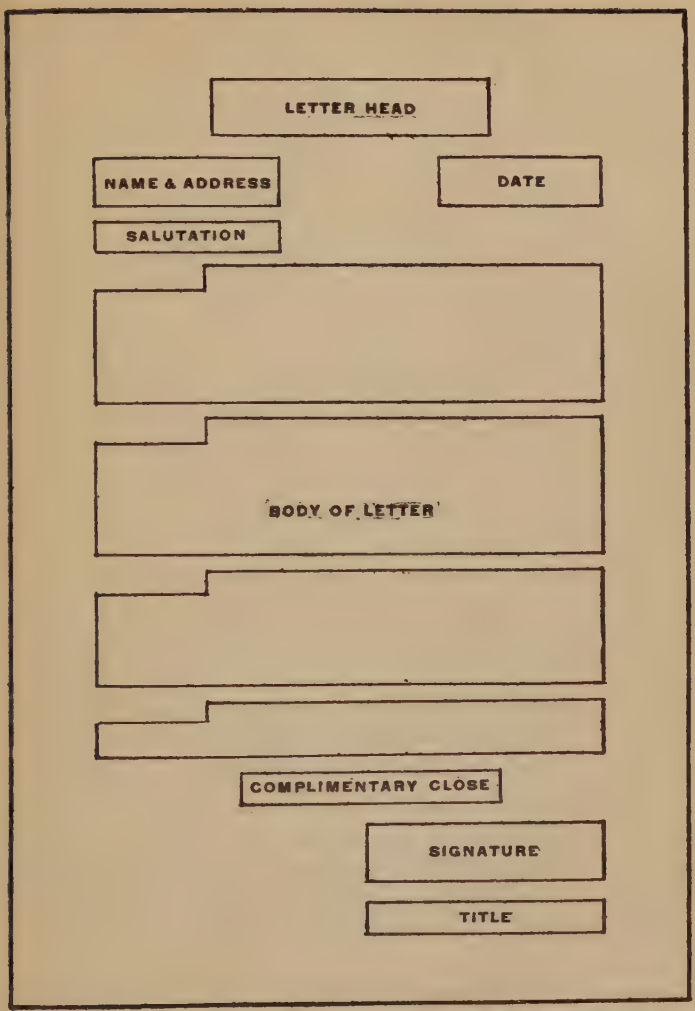
A copy should be kept of every communication that leaves the office. Either a carbon copy may be made at the time the letter is written (six good copies may be made simultaneously on the average typewriter machine, although only one is usually required) or a letter-press copy should be made from the sheet after it is signed. Both forms have been accepted by the courts as legal copies of correspondence. In the average office, constant reference is made to former correspondence; no business house can afford to ignore such a record.

Carbon copies are usually filed alphabetically either by the name of the company or individual to whom the letter is addressed; letter-press copies must necessarily be filed chronologically, even when separate books for each letter of the alphabet are maintained. In either case the search through the files for a letter copy is facilitated by placing the name, address and date of a letter at the top and in a uniform location.

The date of a letter should be placed in the upper right corner of the page; the recipient must know when the communication is sent; it may have a bearing on other communications. The name and address of the addressee, similar to the address on the envelope, should in all cases be placed, as the formal salutation, in the upper left corner of the sheet, whether the correspondent be greeted "Dear Sir" or "Gentlemen." Not only does this establish at once the exact individual for whom the communication is intended, but it facilitates the filing of the correspondence, both by the recipient and by the sender. The margins of a business letter, owing to the limitations of the typewriter, are usually of variable width. The space occupied by the letterhead must, of



This form illustrates common errors in the arrangement of a business letter: margin at left too small; letterhead too near top of sheet; ragged margin at right; date line extending beyond margin; name and address of addressee do not balance with date line; salutation too high; paragraphs not clearly indicated; crowding at bottom of page.



A good arrangement of a one-page business letter, showing the approved type balance: margins at top and sides uniform; paragraphs in the body may be indicated by indentations of first lines or by double or triple spacings between paragraphs. For convenience as well as economy, business letters now have only single spacings between lines.

course determine the margin at the top of the sheet. Theoretically, the margins at the left and right should be exactly the same size; practically, however, the typewriter lines will vary in length and cause an uneven edge on the right side. In printing, the use of many sized slugs not only between the words but between the letters themselves, rectifies these variations, but the typewriter is not so equipped. The more even the right margin is and the more uniform it is to the left margin, the better the effect. The margin should be about one or one and a half inches in width.

The margin at the bottom should not be smaller and preferably greater than the side margins. Should it be smaller, the page will at once appear cramped for space, as the reading matter will be really running over into the margin—a typographical blunder that is as noticeable on typewritten as on printed pages.

The spacing between the lines and between the paragraphs of a business letter may vary somewhat to suit the tastes of the individual although considerations of a practical nature tend to establish a few general principles. Both for purposes of convenience and of economy, for instance, a letter should be as compact as possible, both in words and in mechanical production—it should not take up two sheets if one will serve. Hence most business letters are single spaced—only a single space on the typewriter separates one line from another. Even when a letter is short, it is advisable for purposes of uniformity, to use single spaces only.

THE first line of each paragraph is usually indented from five to fifteen points on the machine—each business house should establish exactly what this indentation shall be in order to secure uniformity in its corre-

spondence. Instead of indenting the first line, some concerns designate the paragraphs by merely separating them by several spacings, and typewriting the first line squarely upon the left margin. The best practice, however, seems to embody both of these methods, and the average business letter usually has its paragraphs separated by a spacing two or three times as great as the spacings between the lines and the first line of the paragraph is usually indented.

The use of uniform typewriter ribbons on all the machines operated by one concern is rapidly and properly coming into favor. It is good business to have all the letters issuing from one house of similar appearance. They should be uniform typographically—in spacings, margins, forms of salutation, addressing. And no one item is more important in securing this uniformity than similarity in the color of the typewriter ribbon. In recognition of this fact, most concerns now furnish their typists with ribbons that are bought in lots and kept in stock. Purple ribbons are perhaps the most popular, not only because the color is bold but also because the chemical ingredients used blend well and give a smooth, durable impression on the paper.

THE address on the envelope, to which the salutation at the top of the letter should correspond either exactly or in slightly condensed form, may be properly typewritten in various ways. The style that is most observed, however, and which therefore has the stamp of general approval, provides for an indentation of about five points on each line of the address.

The spacings between the lines are usually single or double; greater spacing tends to separate the address too much to allow it to be quickly read. Still another

approved though less popular form of address does not indent the lines at all.

Any radical departure from these forms should be made cautiously, especially if the various items of the address are separated from each other. The address, like a paragraph, is generally read as a unit—as a single, distinct idea. The closer the address conforms to the generally accepted forms, the more readily are the envelopes handled by the postoffice and with less danger of delay or loss.

Even when all of the above details in the mechanical production of a business letter have been carefully observed, its effect may be destroyed by carelessness. A conspicuous erasure on the sheet, a blot, or a finger mark nullifies the impression that is created by an otherwise perfect page. Care should be taken to guard against creating any wrong impression.

The Right Letter

UNNAMED trifles and unconscious impressions drag sales across the line of profit. The stupid, ill-dressed letter dissuades more buyers than all the errors salesmen make. The neat and self-forgetful sheet brings with it its own "welcome" motto.

Part II

ELEMENTS OF THE BUSINESS LETTER

The Single Aim

SOME men talk without getting anywhere in particular. Aiming at nothing, they hit their mark.

And some letters go rambling from salutation to close. They are so many ink marks that take up space.

But listen to the master lawyer make his plea. He selects his points, marshalls them in order, drives them home, aiming always at one vital end—the verdict.

And the good business letter has a single design. Attention, interest, desire, are essentials enroute, but they all lead to one terminal—action.

Plan your letters logically, but keep one end in view—to crystallize wants, turn desire to decision, get results, the order—now.

CHAPTER IV

How to Start a Letter—Attention

MOST men *want* to read your letters. Even a busy man—a man whose daily mail runs into hundreds of pieces—is just as anxious to read what you have to say as you are to have him.

But he can't—he simply can't.

He opens the sheet with interest, even with enthusiasm. "What's this?" he says. "From Jones and Company—who are they?—what's their proposition?—blank books, eh?—we'll be needing some pretty soon and I'm not entirely satisfied with the last lot we bought from Smith and Company."

That's your man's attitude nine times in ten. He's ready, willing, anxious to be favorably impressed with your sales letter, and what does he get?

A stereotyped opening.

A pointless proposition that probably does not contain the very information he wants.

A grovelling, beseeching, spineless superscription.

The first acts upon his interest about as a pail of cold water would; the second irritates him; the last—if he ever gets that far—simply adds speed to the fillip with which he files it in the nearby waste basket.

If your letters do not bring results, do not console yourself with the false belief that all sales letters are scrapped by the clerk or boy who opens the mail. Once in a hundred times—maybe. The other ninety and nine failures are due to some fault with the letter or the proposition it presents.

NOT, understand me, that I claim *any* letter will give returns in *every* case, but the right sort of a letter will invariably leave the right sort of an impression. Your man may not be in the market, he may not feel able to make the immediate investment, he may be engrossed with matters of such importance as not to be able to study your proposition. But if the letter is right, it will do its work.

A bad start will kill an otherwise passable sales letter.

What is a bad start? I should say any opening which does not nail attention with the first phrase, which does not turn this attention to vital, personal interest.

Attention!

Study that word carefully. There are as many ways of attracting attention as there are colors in the rainbow. A few primary rules may be evolved, but these are subject to an infinite number of shadings and variations. Personal taste will determine how best to attract attention in different classes of letters; conditions, moods and the exigencies of the moment will govern the exact coloring and tone of the individual letter. Your start should make the reader feel as if you yourself were at his desk, making your talk.

As you hope to do this by all means steer away from the stereotyped opening. You will never get a man's attention if you begin in the same old common-place way: "*I have the honor to inform you,*" or "*In reply to yours*

of the 18th I beg to state." There is no particular honor involved in informing me and no reason on earth why a man should "beg to state" something I have asked him. A business man told me that he got so sick of "begging" letters that he fired them all into the waste-basket.

Why not say what you have to say right off the bat? When I write for a catalogue, for example, why should a man begin his letter in reply with a preamble like this: "*Answering your recent favor addressed to our office, we wish to state that under separate cover we are mailing you a copy of our 1911 catalogue and trust you may find such a lamp as you require illustrated therein.*"

Why not break right in: "*The catalogue you asked for the other day is going to you in this mail and we are so confident that you will find listed in it just the kind of a lamp you want that we want you to go through it very carefully.*" What's the difference? I feel instinctively on reading the first that they are sending me that catalogue as a favor. The other gets my attention and interest because I am made to feel there *is* a lamp in that catalogue that I want.

After all, the easiest and best way to start a letter is to be perfectly natural. When a clothier answers my inquiry with "*Agreeable to your request of recent date we enclose you our booklet,*" he not only fails to make a good impression, but he actually makes a bad one. He begins that way simply because he thinks formalities are necessary. But in doing so he flies wide of a good beginning because the sentence is not only stilted, but it implies that he is condescending to do me a favor.

How much more natural it is to begin as this motor manufacturer does: "*Our idea in the manufacture of a motor is just this—the customer wants a motor that is mechanically correct.*" And here is a man who would sell me a cedar chest. He gets my attention and interest

	Dear Mr. Burke:
Attention	You wouldn't think of throwing away your fountain pen simply because the ink is exhausted.
Explanation and argument	Then why throw away your worn duplicating machine ribbons? We can re-ink them as well as you can fill your fountain pen.
Argument and proof	If you will examine one of your apparently worthless ribbons you will find that the fabric is scarcely worn at all. We take these, treat them with our special process, refill them with ink and return them to you practically new ribbons and for only one-half the cost.
Persuasion	Read the enclosed folder--it explains our proposition fully. But a trial will convince you. And the sooner you send them them the more you'll save.
Clincher	Why not pack them up, put on the enclosed shipping label and send them along right now?
	Yours very truly,

Here is a sales letter that is especially good because it presents its proposition fully and clearly, and makes a strong and convincing appeal in a few paragraphs. All the elements of salesmanship are present, yet they are so cleverly interwoven that the letter stands, first of all, as a unit.

Attention is won through a combination of the two methods of opening a letter recommended in this chapter—use of the word "you" and a direct unusual statement. Another virtue of the opening is that it states a fact that the reader is forced to agree to, thus laying the basis of confidence that is so desirable in every selling transaction.

The first three paragraphs explain the proposition and all are likewise full of argument. Proof of the reasonableness of the proposition is offered in the suggestion that the reader examine the ribbons himself.

There is both persuasion and inducement in paragraph four's urgent argument of money saved, and the close is a good example of how action may be prompted when you do not give the prospect anything to sign. Two instances are presented of calling attention to enclosures without breaking the continuity of the letter, and the reference to the shipping label is an especially good example of making it easy for the prospect to order.

from the start when he says: "*You know that in Colonial days nothing was considered equal to a red cedar chest for preserving furs, blankets, etc.*"

SOME writers of success-bringing letters consider that the problem of gaining attention is solved best by use of several words, sometimes displayed in capitals or underlined, as the first paragraph of the letter, thus:

"Dear Sir:

"BIG PROFITS FOR YOU!"

"Dear Sir:

"FIRE TWO OF YOUR CLERKS."

"Dear Sir:

"You MUST act today."

"Dear Sir:

"MAY I GIVE YOU $1000.00?"

This plan is based upon successful advertising practice. It is to a sales letter what a catch-line is to an advertisement. You summarize the most striking feature of your proposition into the smallest possible number of words and hurl them at your prospective buyer with all the emphasis at your command.

Used with discretion, the idea is excellent. It makes the reader sit up. The human mind is so constructed that it requires a positive and conscious mental effort to turn aside from any thing which has aroused curiosity. The normal operation of the mind is to satisfy that curiosity, even though the reader's cold reason tells him that he is not likely to be interested. An admirable example of this scheme was the letter of a magazine publisher addressed to subscribers from whom renewals of subscriptions were being solicited. The letter opened with the single word—

"Expired!"

Very few of those who received that letter failed to read further to learn who, or what, had expired. Another instance is that of a collection agency. This concern had a series of form letters designed to facilitate collections, and the circular letter through which it brought the proposition to the attention of possible clients opened—

"YOU DO NOT PAY YOUR BILLS PROMPTLY, SIR!"

Naturally, the man who received such a slap in the face did not toss the letter aside without learning more.

The advantage of the display-line opening is that it virtually compels the reader to continue into the second paragraph of your letter. The danger is that you may arouse an interest which the balance of your communication, or the merit of your proposition, does not justify. This style of opening is like the catch-line of an advertisement or the head line of a newspaper article. The ad-writer who shrieks "Prices Slaughtered" and then lists staple goods at prevailing prices misses fire. The newspaper which habitually employs lurid headlines and six-inch type to set forth the ordinary doings of a dull day has nothing in reserve when an event warranting the spread eagle scream line occurs. The method is one to use sparingly and only when other means fail.

NEXT in importance to the display-line as a means of riveting attention, stands the word "You." Nothing is so important to a man as himself; there is no subject on which he would rather talk—or listen. Some say this is vanity. It is not. No man ever amounted to anything who did not consider himself, his methods, plans, judgment, accomplishments, to be thoroughly practical and worthy of emulation. This is not smugness or

self-complacency. It is the normal attitude of a man entitled to sit at a roll-top desk. It is, if you please, your own attitude—the attitude of self respect. The intelligent writer of sales letters will employ the word "You" with tact and discretion. Because it is the open sesame to every man's attention is the very reason why it should be carefully guarded and sparingly used for business-getting at all times.

A sales letter is designed to lead a man to a new interest, change a man's point of view or alter his past convictions. Before he reads the letter he holds one of three views; either he never heard of your proposition (in which case he must be enlightened); or he is satisfied with his present goods or methods; or he has an active prejudice against you.

In any case, his opinion must be respected, though you are writing in an endeavor to alter it.

TO OPEN a letter with, "*You realize, of course, that you are losing money by not buying our——*" is to insult your prospective customer by telling him that he is deliberately throwing away money.

"You" is the second most important word in the vocabulary and the second oldest. As an attention-compeller it is without peer, but it is a word with which one may not take liberties. The writer of sales letters must remember that he is generally addressing a stranger, and that while a friendly, natural, man-to-man attitude is desirable, nothing that verges upon familiarity will be tolerated. "You" is familiar. It will, without doubt, get the reader's attention. Therefore, be sure that it gets the right sort of attention. When a certain eminent surgeon was asked what part of the human body was most sensitive, he replied, "The pocketbook." Even a

crude appeal to the purse will win attention. Men are in business to make money. The individual to whom your sales letter is addressed is as intent on money-getting as yourself. These, then, are points upon which we may be sure we can gain instant attention—the display line, the word "You" and the appeal to the pocket.

It is easy enough to attract attention: the rub comes when you endeavor to vitalize that attention into personal, undivided interest.

The first is a trick of words. Cry "Stop!" and every man within hearing will turn to your call. But the next word uttered must make its personal appeal or the attention gained is again lost. And attention lost is a double loss, for a man once tricked into pausing to hear something of no interest will not be tricked again.

That, I believe, is the most treacherous pitfall of the writer of sales letters—the employment of shrewd means to gain a hearing and the failure to take advantage of the opportunity with a letter which will interest, persuade and finally carry absolute conviction. Too many writers stop half way. They are like a chap I knew at college—always able to get a job but never able to hold one. He told me it was because the "gilt wore off."

You have your man's attention: now for his interest!

SUGGEST that you can help the reader of your letter and you have his attention. Tell how, and you have his interest. Prove it, and you are likely to have his signature.

CHAPTER V

How to Arouse Interest

AMONG magazine and newspaper writers the acknowledged form of successful short fiction is the "human interest story"—one dealing with primitive passions, the incidents of which are common experience. Your wash-woman and the heiress at boarding school, your office boy and the director of a great railway, are equally—though perhaps differently—affected by it. It deals with fundamentals. It ignores non-essentials. Human interest it is which packs the playhouse, which makes possible a penny press, which sells millions of magazines. Properly handled, it may be made the basis of nine-tenths of your successful sales letters.

Human interest is a vague term; one difficult to define and even more difficult to apply to a cold commercial proposition. Perhaps the easiest and quickest way to arrive at an understanding is to cite examples taken at random from several widely different industries.

Let us suppose we are writing to a woman on the subject of boy's clothing. This is a subject which lends itself readily to the display line opening described in the preceding chapter, so we will use it, thus:

"DEAR MRS. MYERS:

"About that Boy of yours."

We have her attention; of that there can be no doubt, for the boy is the most interesting subject in the world to his mother, whether he be an effeminate little book-worm or the neighborhood terror. Now what statement can we next make to turn that attention into interest and lead naturally to our proposition? What little fact of human nature will open her mind, enlist her sympathy, gain her confidence and bring her to look at our proposition from the right standpoint?

"He is arriving at the age when his spirit of manliness asserts itself. You find him imitating his father's manners—he is using your embroidery scissors to shave with —he is no longer ambitious to be a policeman, but has his eye on the Presidency. Among the serious problems with him today is this:—he is beginning to want manly, square-cut 'grown-up' clothes. He is no longer satisfied with ordinary boys' clothes. He wants something 'like father's.'"

This is human interest. We touch upon that pathetically humorous period of transformation between childhood and youth in order that we may bring our reader to approach the subject of her boy's clothes from the boy's own viewpoint.

AGAIN we may take as an example, a letter written by the manufacturer of an electric motor-controlling device who wished to persuade electrical contractors to use his goods:

"Dear Sir:

"I was on board the U. S. Monitor 'Florida' when she was hit by a Whitehead torpedo containing 200 pounds of gun-cotton.

"'A ticklish position,' you say?

"Not at all. The water-tight compartments of the 'Florida' are controlled by Ajax Automatic Switches. When the torpedo hit us the Ajax Automatic closed the bulkheads. I felt entirely safe and secure because I knew the Ajax would not fail."

Here we have war, dynamite and sudden death as the elements of human interest. The writer referred to a subject that had had wide publicity. He added a bit of personal experience, gave his readers some of the inside history of an important event.

Again, a maker of eye-wash might say:

"Dear Sir:

"Trouble with your eyes?

"Ten thousand people went blind last year in New York State alone. Over 1,000,000 pairs of eye-glasses were sold. Are your eyes in danger?"

Here we appear to fear—a primitive passion.

The whole object of employing the human interest idea is to lead the reader naturally to the point of view from which we desire him to consider our proposition.

This is important.

In the stern competition of today, any successful sales plan must be given a peculiar, an individual twist. We must accentuate some point of superiority. And then—we must bring our prospective buyer to view the proposition from that angle. This, in cases where one deals with people unfamiliar with technicalities of our business, can be done best by the introduction of the human interest element.

THE problem of securing the interest of a man who understands thoroughly the general proposition we have to present, is somewhat more difficult.

Intimate question wins attention

Dear Mr. Benson:

Arouses interest

You believe in protecting your home from fire, don't you? But how about protecting it from the other elements?

Explanation runs into argument

The next time it rains, your shingle roof may leak, your ceilings may be water soaked and some of the choicest and most valued contents of your home damaged beyond repair.

Argument

For sooner or later, shingles are bound to warp and curl, pulling out nails and allowing the rain to beat in. Furthermore, they rot quickly when shaded and even though they may LOOK firm, they allow the water to soak through.

Explanation and proof

But it isn't necessary for you to run this risk. For at no more than what ordinary shingles cost, you can get absolute protection--in Flintoid. Here at last is a roofing that will withstand year in and year out the most severe weather conditions.

Persuasion

Flintoid is made of the very best of raw materials. It is laid in three layers over the entire surface. Over that goes a red coating that oxidizes after a short exposure and makes a surface solid as slate and absolutely unaffected by heat, cold or dampness.

Inducement

Just sit down for a moment and figure up how long it has been since your roof was put on. Can you trust longer to its doubtful protective qualities? Flintoid can be laid right over the old roof, as the booklet shows. The cost includes nails and cement--and we pay the freight.

Clincher

Simply fill in the dimensions of your roof on the enclosed order blank, sign and mail today.

Very truly yours,

This letter is a good example of interest won and held from beginning to end. Almost every paragraph contains explanation, cleverly combined with other elements. Argument begins with showing the inferiority of shingle roofs, and continues through paragraph five. Proof of quality is found in the explanation of weather effects; persuasion, in the query as to the shingle roof; inducement, in the agreement to pay freight charges. The closing sentence brings action.

Quality, price, service and profit are what such a buyer looks at. Human interest can seldom be invoked to hold his attention. But there is a way—"technical interest" we will call it for convenience.

Scattered about the world there remain a few "know-it-alls" to whom technical advances are a fallacy and the march of progress a stampede to ruin. But the generality of men are ready and eager to take advantage of every improvement—watch closely every new development in their trades. In going to a manufacturer with a new machine, a new attachment for use on his product or even a staple material, immediate attention can be gained by attracting to his notice at once your leading point of superiority and explaining it tersely, technically.

If you are writing to an electric light man on the subject of a new incandescent lamp for use on his lines, get right down to cases.

"Dear Sir:

"An efficiency of one watt per candle is guaranteed for the Hilight Lamps, which efficiency is maintained throughout a guaranteed life of 1,000 hours.

"The attached report of tests by the Electrical Testing Laboratories will give you exact, detailed and unprejudiced information on this new unit."

To the general public, or to anyone unfamiliar with the technicalities of the incandescent lamp business, such an appeal would be unintelligible. To men who know, it is the surest as well as the most direct method of exciting interest.

The danger of an appeal to technical interest lies in the fact that we sometimes give our readers credit for more knowledge than they actually possess. Another, and graver danger is that we are liable to lapse into

technical jargon in dealing with everybody, instead of reserving it for the few who know and appreciate.

THERE are, of course, any number of other ways to create real interest—the kind of interest that will carry the reader through your descriptive paragraphs and lead him to the favorable consideration of your proposition. An appeal to the pocket, a bit of trade news, the citing of a difficulty which is worrying him and which your product or service is designed to overcome—all of these are available.

But be sure that your appeal is to *his* interest—that you are making the right kind of a personal appeal, just as the man in the high collar tries to get the interest of his more humble working neighbor.

The common error is to ramble along on a subject which is of interest to yourself, not your prospective customers.

"*We have just finished our fine new forty-acre factory,*" may be news but it doesn't touch a vital spot in the man who has been buying for ten years from your competitor with four acres of floor space, who gives personal attention to each order and delivers the goods promptly.

When you have your prospect's attention, follow your advantage by appealing to *his* interest—not by talking about yourself, your factory and your product. "Hit him where he lives," is slang, but it has a grim significance to the writer of sales letters.

"Hit him where he lives" and his interest will carry him through your paragraphs of description, will lead him straight to your psoposition, will put him in a frame of mind to say "yes" when he reads that proposition.

CHAPTER VI

How to Hold Interest—Explanation

YOU have attracted attention: you have won interest: now to explain your proposition. "This," says that amateur writer of sales letters, "is a cinch. All one has to do is to tell about the goods."

That's all—tell about the goods.

This sounds easy, does it not? One has but to produce a word-picture of a definite object or describe tersely a service which you offer. Yet if there is a gift more rare than that of translating a concrete article into words, it is the ability to see that article in the mind's eye. Both are necessary when one begins to "tell about the goods." Holman, in his "Ginger Talks to Salesmen," says "it takes a long time to tell something you don't know," and similarly, it takes a good many words to picture in another's mind something which you see only vaguely in your own.

The theory of successful letter-writing may be learned easily and the "tricks of the trade" assimilated at a glance, but the ability to form a mental picture and make others see it vividly by means of words is something which comes with patient labor. And it is something which cannot be taught—it must be learned.

Wrap your mind about the thing you have to sell. Analyze it—study it—finger it over with the tentacles of the brain. Concentrate upon it so long and with such singleness that the product and all its parts will swim plainly into view before your closed eyes.

Watch a man telling a story. He visualizes each point and situation for his listener. You can profit by his art. Eliminate non-essentials or the points in your product which are common to all similar goods. Center upon the details of superiority. Then draw your word picture in a few simple, strong, definite phrases.

Easy? The best minds in literature have staggered before that problem. It is what raises sales-letter writing and advertising to the plane of a fine art. It is the reason men of true literary genius are to be found today in the ranks of the business correspondents.

In "telling about the goods," one must speak to one of two classes—people who know something about this class of product or people to whom the whole proposition is new and strange. In the one case, the writer aims to bring out only the points of superiority in his product: in the other, the whole proposition must be made plain.

Points of superiority in a staple goods are frequently a matter of opinion. The proprietor for whom you write must be given credit for a certain amount of parental bias. Like the cleverness and amiability of his babies, the superiority of his product may consist merely in a more or less justifiable pride in his own ability as a producer.

IT IS best to look at the proposition from the user's standpoint always and to present it in its final relation to that user. To describe the details of manufacture and the high grade, expensive materials used in a foun-

tain-pen is the maker's idea: the user wants to know that this pen never leaks, is easily and quickly refilled, that it does not clog and requires no special sort of writing fluid.

Nor is it enough that these vital facts be stated—they must be put in such phrases as will attract, humor and convince the reader. A real estate promotor shows us how this may be done:

"Fresh Spring Water, so pure and delicious that it is bottled and sold, is piped through all the streets. Just think of that, as compared with having to buy your table water, or to drink Croton water unsatisfactorily filtered!"

A manufacturer of bathroom equipment is equally successful when he says:

"Porcelain Enameled Ware is a perfect unity of iron and porcelain enamel—the strongest and most durable combination ever produced in a sanitary fixture, having the indestructible strength of iron with the showy elegance of fine china. Their extraordinary wearing quality is only one of the reasons why these beautiful fixtures afford more years of satisfactory service per dollar of cost than any other variety of plumbing equipment in the world."

In some cases the points of superiority consist in high quality of raw material, exceptional grade of labor or peculiar process of manufacture. The common expressions used to qualify these points carry no conviction. "Best on earth," "above competition," "secret process of manufacture,"—such stereotyped phrases were abandoned by intelligent writers when P. T. Barnum struck Broadway fifty years ago.

If *Robinson Crusoe* had been written in the "best on earth" style of generalities, it would never have reached

print. The earmark of a true tale or a sincere description is an unconscious emphasis on little specific points that a man can scarcely imagine, but is sure to notice as he actually lives the part or touches the goods.

TAKE, for instance, so simple a tool as a tap. All one can say about it, apparently, is that it is well made, of the best steel and carefully tempered. Everybody who ever wrote a letter on these tools said the same thing in the same words, until a New England manufacturer tried his hand. That letter was a masterpiece. In describing the goods he said: *"You could forge a first class razor from one of our taps and the razor would cut smooth and clean for the same reason that the tap does—'twould have the right stuff in it."*

Let that one sink in.

He does not say that his tap is made from razor steel, (which would be common-place), but that *you could make a razor from one of his taps* (which is distinctive). And then instead of a lot of hackneyed phrases designed to convince the reader that this steel is the best on earth, he states succinctly that his tap has "the right stuff in it."

He simply takes a fresh viewpoint—has the courage to use unexpected words.

The same principle applies everywhere. Avoid extravagance, vague claims, generalities, superlatives. Exaggerations gain nothing. The world today knows that for every high grade product there are a dozen "just as good." It may be true that yours is the best on earth, but it will take either a mighty good presentation of that fact or a detailed explanation of at least one point of superiority to make a stranger believe it.

Sometimes whole paragraphs of description may be crystallized into a single suggestion of comparison. *"The*

Bell refrigerator," says one letter writer, "*is as finely finished as the most expensive piano.*"

A furniture maker gives me a distinct impression of the quality of his goods when he says: "*There is as much difference between the oak used in ordinary furniture and the selected quarter sawed white oak we use in ours as there is between laundry soap and a cake of scented Pears.*" And still another puts a wealth of suggestion into his letter by saying: "*Nothing will effectually take the place of the good old cedar chest, with its clean, sweet, pungent aroma so dear to the heart of the old-fashioned housewife.*"

TO EXPLAIN a new proposition to one who knows nothing of it, one must naturally begin with general statements; also one must begin with something with which the reader is familiar. A piece of *art nouveau* jewelry, for example, is almost impossible of definite word-picturing, yet reference to the modern French school of design and allusions to a popular Parisian jeweler would call up in the reader's mind a picture which would satisfy. The object here is to stimulate the imagination rather than attempt to portray an actuality. A piece of silk might be said to resemble in tone the colorings of a rare old Japanese print, which is wholly ambiguous but leads the mind back to a vaguely exquisite memory. The result of such suggestion is almost as definite as if we show the article, while a series of superlative adjectives such as "most harmonious coloring, exquisite design and charming ensemble" leave no other impression than one of admiration for the writer's command of words.

In any explanation, specific or general, it should be the writer's idea to so describe his goods that the reader

will both understand and desire them. It is not enough to tell what you have for sale, but you must tell it in a sales-making manner. A clever haberdasher never shows a scarf in the box. He takes it out and with a deft twist forms a four-in-hand over his finger and the customer not only sees the scarf—its color, weave and the play of light over the silken surface—but he sees it in its relation to himself, as it will look when worn.

THIS should be the idea of the sales-letter writer as well as the salesman—show the goods in their final relation to the customer.

A salt manufacturer carries out this idea in this manner: *"You know how ordinary table salt refuses to sift in damp weather and when dry, cakes in the salt sellers like adamant. Our salt is always dry and flaky and it flows freely on the dampest day."*

And a maker of underwear strikes home when he says: *"Crown underwear lets your body breathe. A continuous current of fresh air passes through the holes in the fabric, cooling, cleaning and stimulating the pores of the skin."* Such description wins interest and even arouses desire because the reader feels its relation to himself.

But under no circumstances, in the efforts to make your explanation of human interest, let it make an indefinite impression. Better picture your product with the exactness with which the draftsman draws a new machine, even though it does look dry and mechanical, than convey any but the actual facts, and convey them plainly. The most successful mediums today, the big mail order houses, describe their products with the most exact and apparently prosaic details. But to give the width and length of a rug, the exact order of colors, the length of the fringe—these facts give an impression of

realness and also visualize the article to the customer. Not only visualize it, but by giving the dimensions and appearance, visualize it in the place where the buyer would like to see it, on the floor in a certain spot in the home where it will fit.

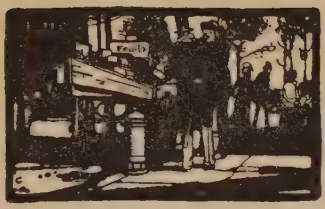
Vitalize the Facts

LET your correspondent know that a personal interest attaches to him —a real personal interest that is not measured wholly by his order and his dollar.

Talk to him along the purple ribbon as one man would talk to another—with point, tact and brevity; with keen business sense and clever understanding of his needs.

In return you will win that close, personal association and active support which builds business.

—*George H. Barbour*



CHAPTER VII

How to Create Desire—Argument and Proof

IT IS a principle in law that a man is innocent until proved guilty. It is a principle in business that a sales claim is false or exaggerated until it is proved conservative and true. In either event, the work of proving a case is a hard one, and calls for keen thought and a wide knowledge of human nature.

Cold, hard logic, and cold, hard facts—these alone will win.

Brag, claims, "hot air," if you please, spell failure.

When you have explained your proposition in a sales letter, you must prove your words. It is not enough to express your own personal convictions: it is not enough to say that a million of your devices have been sold; it is not enough to give hearsay evidence or second-hand testimonials. You must prove your claims, and quickly.

Of course, many times the only way to prove that an article is all that you say and claim it is, is for me to buy it, try it and use it. But suppose I am thinking of buying a mattress and the dealer writes to me, *"This mattress will never mat, pack, get hard or lumpy, and furthermore, it is absolutely non-absorbent, dust proof,*

vermin proof and practically un-wear-out-able." Now if all this is true, that is the kind of a mattress I want, and to prove to me that these claims are true the writer goes on to say, "*Remember, we sell on the complete understanding, if the mattress is not perfectly satisfactory, or better still, completely to your liking, it can be returned at our expense, and your money will be promptly refunded.*" I reason instantly that if the writer of that letter wasn't able to prove his arguments by delivering the goods as exploited, he would never dare to make an offer like this. I know from experience that a plain hard-hitting talk like this means truth.

A maker of refrigerators proves his goods are quality stock, too, when he says: "*If I could only take you through our factory so you could see what goes into the 'Morton' and how it is put in—the care and pains we take to make a refrigerator that will last a lifetime, you would not hesitate to make the investment.*"

The average man wants proof, first, of the values you offer. This holds good whether you are selling emery wheels or elephants. It must either be better at the same price, or priced lower, than similar goods purchased elsewhere. Even where the article for sale has no competitor it is necessary to assure the customer, directly or indirectly, that he is getting a bit more than his money's worth.

THIS does not mean that we must talk cheapness or claim to offer extravagant values. It does not mean that we must talk price at all. It means simply that we must show the customer where he gains by the purchase.

Gain!

That word is the foundation-stone of all success in salesmanship by mail. Show the prospect how he gains

by purchasing—and not alone in money, for fiscal advantage is not always the keynote; but in comfort, satisfaction, well-being and happiness.

Show the prospect his gain—and prove it.

The fact that a hot water heater is being used by hundreds of householders in my city may be a sound argument as to the popularity of this heater, or the good work of a salesman. But if I am looking for a heater that will save money this argument doesn't fill by needs nor supply my demands. However, if the man writing about heaters says, *"This heater also saves money by burning pea or No. 1 buckwheat coal and burns from 30% to 60% less of it than any other steam or hot water heater yet shown on the patent records,"* this line of argument fits into my ideas exactly.

A real estate man of my acquaintance sent out four letters describing the beauties of his sub-division, the select neighborhood, the excellence of the houses sold on easy payments; and all those letters failed. The fifth letter was a success, brought inquiries and developed business. The secret of that success was in the following paragraphs:

"You pay rent, do you not? Suppose you applied that same check towards a home of your own. You would not be paying out any more money, and at the end of a few years, instead of being the owner of a pile of musty receipts, you would be the owner of a fine house and lot.

"Here are the figures: prove to yourself that it can be done."

BUT go further. Show the prospect he cannot lose, and prove that also. Where a proposition involves over a dollar, the man you want to sell begins to figure

the chances. He has probably been stung (or believes he has, which is the worse for you) on a similar proposition in the past. Show him that he takes no chance with you—prove it to him.

A well-known glass company which manufactures scientific reflectors for all classes of interior lighting uses photometric curves, prepared by the most eminent independent authority, to establish its claims. Perhaps not half of those who receive this evidence are able to correctly read or understand a photometric curve, but the very fact that impartial evidence is offered as proof is enough to win the prospective customer's confidence.

Similarly, a paint manufacturer encloses a small folder with his sales letter showing how to test the purity of paint; a clothing manufacturer explains how to distinguish all-wool goods from the half-cotton product offered in substitution; a maker of acetylene gas lighting outfits proves the simplicity and safety of this gas—which is popularly supposed to be dangerous in the extreme—by describing how anyone may make acetylene gas with an ordinary tumbler and common clay pipe. Such proof, sometimes applied in a most indirect manner, is wholly convincing. Not the least part of its value lies in the fact that it is instructive. The reader feels that he is learning a trick of the other fellow's trade.

"Do not think because the price is small, that my cigars are made carelessly or of cheap tobacco," writes a mail order cigar man. *"Order a sample 100, cut open any five of them from end to end, and if the leaves are not all good long filler, I will refund your money."*

A varnish manufacturer sends along a sample panel finished with his varnish and writes: *"Give this panel the most thorough test possible—stamp on it with your heel or hit it with a hammer. Then hold it to the light.*

Proof wins attention

Interest

Argument—minimized cost

Argument—opportunity pictured

Argument and persuasion

Method explained

Explanation

Inducement

Clincher

Dear Mr. Hunt:

There's a bank here in Chicago --not much larger than yours--that secured over 280 new saving's depositors last month! And secured them, mind you, on the sole strength of business-getting circular letters--without the aid of a single personal solicitor.

That's why this letter is as vital to you as though it were a certified check. For it tells about a concise, WONDERFULLY-PRACTICAL little book that will show you how to write the same kind of letters that brought this business for the Chicago bank--and how you can get this same book for less than you often pay for a mere handful of good cigars.

Think of the hundreds of money earners--the thrifty ambitious young men and women--right in your own immediate locality--who ought to open up savings accounts. If you had them all together in your private office--where you could talk to them as man to man--it would be no trick to secure a big proportion of them.

Of course, you can't do this. But why not do as the Royal Trust Company did? Why not go to THEM? Why not put the strong advantages your bank offers before them through sincere, heart-to-heart, straight-from-the-shoulder letters--letters that breathe the same ENTHUSIASM, the same earnestness and personality that you yourself would use in a personal talk?

That is just what this book will show you how to do, because it gives you plain simple practical hints on the every-day use of words--and live vital principles underlying the art of convincing writing.

And mind you this banker's college course in business English--boiled down to pigeon-hole size--costs less than a couple of theatre tickets. $2 brings the book to your own desk--and if you do not feel that it is worth at least half a dozen times this amount you can have your money back for the asking. Simply wrap a two dollar bill in this letter and mail today.

Yours very truly,

A strong, convincing letter, in which argument and proof prevails from the opening sentence through to the clinching close.

You will find that although you have dented the wood, the varnish has not been cracked."

A paper manufacturer is even more successful when he says: "*You can prove the excellence of our word in a second: just tear a corner off this sheet; then tear a corner off one of your present letter heads; now get a magnifying glass and examine both torn edges. You find long fibres—linen threads—on ours, while on yours the fibres are short, woody.*" The man who reads this learns something new about paper. He learns how to judge it intelligently—and learning, he learns what the writer wished him to know about his bond.

Another simple expedient is referring for corroboration to standard works of reference, to friends of the reader or to specialists in any line. "*As any chemist will tell you—,*" is effective. Or we may say: "*Consult your banker as to the solid value of these bonds: he may have others he would prefer to sell you, but he will not fail to endorse these.*" Nine times in ten the reader will never carry the matter further: he accepts your statement merely because you are willing he should take disinterested advice.

There is weight, too, in a sweeping reference to one's neighbors. An umbrella maker scores when he writes: "*If you have friends in Baltimore, drop them a line and ask about Bronson umbrellas. They will tell you they have used our umbrellas for years—generations, often—and always found them good. Such is the name of Bronson in his own home town.*"

DIRECT and complete testimonials are also strong proof, but the use of these by patent medicine advertisers, and the numerous stories current as to the trick-

ery and unfair means used to secure them, makes the testimonial a two edged weapon which must be handled skilfully to be effective. A made-to-order testimonial or one in which names and addresses are omitted is prima facie evidence of insincerity—or worse.

"John Hays Smith, publisher of the Age, 138 West 42nd St., New York, says:" is sincere.

"We are permitted to quote the following from a letter by Mrs. Albert Ross, president of the Woman's League, 462 Woodward Ave., Detroit," rings true.

The name should be well-known; the title, if any, expressed at length, the addresses given in full. Not only that, but the very words and phrases should be such as to make the testimonial stand out with a separate individuality from that of the sales-letter writer. The testimonial, even a bona fide one, that appears to be of a piece with the balance of your letter, as though it ran from the same fountain pen, defeats its purpose. The most successful printed testimonial that ever came under the writer's notice was one in which both the request for an expression of approval and the customer's reply were used together. The combination was unique and its presentation so candid and open that it carried absolute conviction. This scheme could hardly be used in a letter, yet it suggests this train of thought: that the most important point in this whole problem of proving your claims is sincerity.

A LETTER which is irredeemably bad in construction, grammar and transcription will get profitable returns if it is sincere, and those returns will be permanent. But a letter of half-truths, a letter which betrays your unbelief or evidences your effort to befog or mislead your reader, will produce nothing but trouble. It may

bring results, but not the kind of results that any reputable firm wants.

Lack of sincerity in a letter does not necessarily argue dishonesty in the writer. Rather, it indicates a wrong point of view toward the trade. We form the habit of viewing our customers in the mass instead of as individuals. In the petty annoyances of daily detail, we grow impatient of their seeming stupidity, their meanness, their constant complaints, their attempts to take small advantages. And then, when we sit down to write a letter, we address a composite being having these unwelcome characteristics.

For myself, the only sure guide for writing a sincere and effective letter is to picture it as going to some shrewd, kindly, wise, David Harum sort of individual whose keen insight tests every word and statement by the light of long experience.

While it is essential that every claim and statement we make be backed up and reinforced with evidence to substantiate it, there is such a thing as overdoing. Proof may be offered casually, as a matter of course, or it may be injected briefly and apparently without premeditation. A studied effort at honesty is deception, for honesty is by nature either casual or curt.

Be honest. Be frank. Be straightforward—aboveboard—guileless. From the date-line at the top of your letter to the stenographer's hieroglyphics at the bottom, let every word, phrase, sentence and paragraph impress your reader as being wholly and unreservedly "on the level."

CHAPTER VIII

Persuasion

THE word "persuasion" suggests and actually involves a certain intimacy at which it is difficult to arrive in business. Before we dare employ the arts of persuasion we must know that our standing with our prospective customer is such that he will not resent our placing a paternal hand on his knee and talking to him "for his own good." When we have presented our proposition and adduced proof in support of every statement which is not self-evident, we may employ persuasion to gain our end.

But—as you hope for results!—employ it sparingly and with diffidence. Put into it all the ingenuous indirection that you know. Appeal to the other man's springs of action, keep yourself and your will far in the background.

Nothing is better calculated to stir the ire and call forth the contempt of a big, busy, self-sufficient business man than to be asked, *"Can you afford to be without this great boon another day?—will you let your prejudice stand between you and future wealth?"* and similar exhortation. Nothing will so quickly freeze your prospective client into glacial indifference as *"Will your stockholders approve of your rejecting this dividend-produc-*

ing offer?" Yet these phrases and dozens from the same can have been used and used by men whose familiarity with their own work has allowed them to become familiar with their customers.

THE best way to persuade a man to take a trip into the country with you is not to say, *"Come on, Bill, don't stick around here all the time—come on—what's the use of wasting all your time in the city—loosen up for once—come on, won't you?"*

The weak-willed man may give in to such *persuasion*—if he has no good reasons for not going. But the average man buckles up his back against such tactics.

There are men who can take you away from business, even when you ought to stay in town—and want to stay in town. But such a man will approach the matter very tactfully. He will start with a sigh: *"Gee! I'll bet it's pretty in the country just now. Don't you get to longing about this time every year to get out and lie on the grass—to tramp through the woods—or wander along the banks of some little creek and smoke your pipe?*

"I'd just like to get on some old clothes and gather water-cress—say, did you ever tramp along some clear, fresh stream, gather a big bunch of crisp, green water-cress, spear some bull-frogs, roast the frog-legs on a stick over a wood fire, then eat frog-legs, water-cress, bread and butter?—and afterward lie under a tree and smoke and then take a brisk walk home?

"Gee, old man, what do you say to knocking off business and taking a run up to the Glens for Saturday and Sunday—I know just exactly the place up there? Never mind business—I have got business, too,—it will only be one day gone, and you do twice as much work the day

after—let's be happy and have one of the good old-fashioned times."

Which man would get *you?*

That's persuasion.

First make the customer *want* the goods—then show how easy it is to get them—gently *lead* him over the line.

Here is the way a correspondence school uses largely the same idea:

"Think of those times when you have yearned for a future—when you have grown impatient with the barriers that seem to hold you down to such a narrow sphere of life—when you hear of the career of some acquaintance whom you know to be inwardly no more capable than you! It is a matter of developed opportunity.

"Our instructions perfect you in a profession that is golden with opportunity. It fits you for success anywhere. Would you like to make your residence in busy, cosmopolitan New York? Would you like to live in some quaint old southern town like New Orleans? Would you like some bustling western city like Kansas City, or San Francisco? Would you like to live in a quiet old national capital,—Washington?

"The profession we will train you to, will enable you to choose your own location—there is unlimited demand for it everywhere. Will you not let me show you how you may reach out and grasp this opportunity?"

IF A touch of persuasion seems necessary to the proper rounding out of a letter, endeavor to hide it or dilute it, with another ingredient.

See how cleverly this silversmith disguises his persuasion, for instance, how he suggests to me my need of such goods as he offers:

"Does your table equipment as fairly represent your taste and means and far sighted prudence as the balance of your household furnishings? Why not? Your family's happiest hours are spent there. Your friends gather there. The finest associations of your household center about the table. A sterling silver service helps to perpetuate these associations in recollection, and if your selection is a work of true art, reflects credit upon you, through succeeding generations."

No matter how sincere you may be, and no matter how really important and deep-reaching your proposition may be to your prospect, bear always in mind that you are in his office uninvited and perhaps unwelcome and that you may not presume to the slightest intimacy. Here, if anywhere, does the element of breeding enter into business correspondence.

Persuasion of the exhortation type, as practised by the dominie who prefixes every phrase with "O, Brethren," is too dangerous for an ordinary mortal to attempt.

ABOVE all, don't try to persuade a man to answer your letters by assuming an attitude of injury. If a man writes to you for information about the article you have for sale, or requests the sample or booklet you offer to give away free, don't think you can make him send you money by causing him to feel that he is indebted to you for sending him what you agreed to, free of all charges. Don't dictate, or attempt to force him to do business with you. Any letter a man writes you because he thinks he has to isn't worth the stamp that carries it. Here, for example, is the way one firm begins a letter which it expects to win customers:

"Did you ever have the unpleasant experience of addressing a person upon a subject, without even being

accorded the courtesy of a reply—or worse still, did you ever answer any one's questions, to the best of your ability, without receiving a word in return for your time or trouble? If you have had either one or both of these experiences, you will understand how we feel because you haven't answered our letters."

That is only the beginning of this wailing and gnashing of teeth letter. The first thing the young man who received this letter said was, "My, look at the raking over these fellows are giving me, simply because I accepted their invitation to investigate their article. I didn't find it what I wanted, so what was the use of writing?"

Antagonism is the first product of such a letter. Instead of going after a prospect as though he had committed a sin, it would have been a hundred per cent more profitable to have continued the follow-up with a letter showing the prospect that the article was what he needed and wanted.

Another correspondence school gets this idea when it wrote:

"Nearly every man can look back—and not so far back either for most of us—and say, If I had taken that chance, I would be much better off now. That is what you will say some day not far off, if you fail to consider seriously what we have offered you in our law courses, for our proposition means just what I have said—a bigger earning capacity, a better position and standing, and brighter prospects in life."

BUT there is another and subtler form in which the art of suggestion is employed, which may be used frequently and with good results. A prominent ladies' tailor used this idea effectively when he wrote:

Too Formal

Lacks sales value

Prompts no action

Dear Sir:

Agreeable to your recent request for a catalogue of our school and information regarding our business courses, we wish to state that under separate cover we are mailing you a copy of our latest catalogue, in which you will find a complete description of what we have to offer. We trust that after reading this, you will decide to enroll with us.

We shall be pleased to give your further inquiries our best attention and trusting to hear from you again, we are

Very truly yours,

This is an actual letter of the type too often used in replying to an inquiry for a catalogue and information. Here the prospect is referred entirely to the catalogue, while the letter serves only as a too formal acknowledgment, absolutely wanting in sales value. A reply to an inquiry, particularly regarding a school proposition such as this, should aim not only to give the inquirer the full information he requests, but to interest him personally. Note how this is accomplished in the more skilful letter on the opposite page.

"I am sure, madam, that if you could see yourself in one of these suits, you would acknowledge its perfect fit and exceptional finish."

Here is only a suggestion. The active persuasion is left to the imagination which, picturing a desirable result, can be counted upon to overcome the objections of the reader.

A watch manufacturer makes good use of suggestion in this way: *"You probably do not buy a watch with the idea of selling it again; yet that is a pretty good test of value. If you want to know the standing of * * * try to buy one at second hand."*

And even so simple an article as a patent window lock is given a strong appeal when it is put up to me on a basis of suggested cause and effect after this fashion:

Dear Mr. Harrison:

Urges careful reading of catalogue

You will receive under separate cover the catalogue you asked for explaining our courses in shorthand. Read this very carefully, for it will enable you to realize the value of a training in stenography and the unique advantages which our system of instruction affords.

Interest

Your interest in the possibilities of a shorthand training is most commendable. There is a constantly growing demand for good stenographers. Every day we are asked to recommend men and women for attractive positions. And so successful have been the graduates of our school wherever we have recommended them that we are now able to place

Proof

practically every student who finishes our work in a well-paying position.

Personality

I wish I could meet you personally so that I could show you better the practical advantages of our course. We do not merely teach--we TRAIN you so that you continue to develop after your work with us has been completed--so that you get 100% return on your talents.

Inducement

I am particularly anxious to get a student started in your locality. And to enable you to be that one I am going to make you an exceptional offer--a discount of 25% from the regular tuition if you act quickly. I can well afford to do this, because I know that when you have taken up our course you will be so enthusiastic about it that you will recommend it to your neighbors and your friends. Considering the unusual nature of this offer, we are compelled to limit it to one week from the date of this letter, and therefore it will be necessary for you to accept at once.

Clincher

And remember the 25% discount on our $30 course means an actual saving to you of $7.50--the complete course for only $22.50. In order that no possible obstacle shall stand in the way of your accepting this, I am not even going to require that you send a stipulated amount with your application blank. Simply sign it, enclose whatever you can conveniently spare, $2, $3 or $5--whatever suits your purse--and mail today.

Very truly yours,

A good reply to an inquiry, calculated to win the inquirer's personal interest and to prompt his immediate action.

"Why sleep or try to sleep with your windows shut tight and awake in the morning with a dull, sick headache? The WALKER LOCK will give you fresh air without sacrificing security, and you will get up refreshed and ready for a big day's work, healthy and happy."

Another case is that of a piano agency which has done a large business in the East, chiefly through sales-letters written by the head of the firm. One argument presented was:

"Talk this proposition over with your husband. As a business man, he will be able to guide you in business matters. The choice of the instrument can be left to you safely."

PERSUASION that hinges upon self-interest is equally productive of results, but in the stress of much writing and in your endeavors to make each letter as strong as possible, you are prone to overdo it.

"Can you afford to permit a competitor to gain control of this profitable line?" is persuasion to a merchant. *"Certainly your boy should have the best!"* is a strong appeal to a mother. On the other hand, to tell a man that he is losing money every day he hesitates, to tell a woman that she is not treating her offspring right by refusing to equip them at Jones' Emporium, is both untrue and lacking in tact.

Insurance, correspondence instruction, banking by mail building and loan propositions and other lines where the prosperity and comfort of clients is at issue, lend themselves to sale by persuasion. Commodities of daily business are best presented without it.

CHAPTER IX

Inducement

THE hardest lesson in letter-writing I ever learned was on a trip with a city salesman. A letter had been sent out from which there were practically no returns. Naturally the office decided the trade was in bad shape and I was sent to find out why. The first customer was a stolid German.

"Why didn't you answer that letter we sent you last week?" I asked.

"Why should I?" he replied.

And when I got back to the office and re-read that letter I saw the point. There was no reason why anybody should have answered—there was no inducement. From that day to this no sales letter has passed my desk without being given the test of that acid phrase, "Why should I?"

A description of goods, no matter how skilfully phrased, seldom constitutes sufficient inducement to pull a direct reply, even when this description has been cunningly worded so the prospect sees the article advertised in direct relation to himself or his business. The letter without an inducement may convince a man that the goods for sale are desirable and that they are suited to

his personal needs, but it leaves a loop-hole for procrastination.

And procrastination is a whole lot more than "the thief of time." It is the thief of countless orders that should be booked and filled, but aren't.

Your own experience is proof of this. You have probably determined to buy mesh underwear, insured sox, a dozen magazines, a piano player and an automobile—some time. You are convinced of their good points, you know that you want them and you have the price. All that is necessary is the proper inducement—the galvanic spark which will quicken into life this latent desire.

And so with your customers.

INDUCEMENTS are as various as sunsets. *Gain* is at the bottom of them all. Gain is the root of all business action. But gain is not always a matter of dollars and cents. Besides the gain in "Special price for a few days;" the gain in the "Special reduction, if you send your dealer's name;" and the gain in the free sample, there is also the subtle suggestion of gain in "This may change the entire course of your life;" in "Information that may save you hours of uncertainty;" and dozens of others that do not represent anything tangible but mean gain, just the same.

The letter that can suggest a possibility of gain so artfully that the reader is almost afraid *not* to answer for fear of missing something, is a real master-piece.

The inducement of prompt and careful service is one which will always win trade; or you may advertise a limited quantity of a certain article or style; you may play up the seasonableness of the product; you may have a real bargain—in any case, you must include an induce-

Natural expression

Dear Mr. Wilson:

It is just a year since I sent you that memorable letter about the Crown Calculator. When that letter was written I had an unknown, unheard of appliance to tell you about. Today nearly 5,000 of these machines are in everyday use.

Proof

In great business offices all over the land, in stores, in factories, the Crown is saving time, money and errors in clerical labor. It is no longer an experiment. It is a proved, practical appliance which has made itself indispensable wherever it has been installed.

Argument leading to inducement

I don't know why you have been silent during these twelve months. But whatever has prevented you from trying this machine, I want to remove that obstacle now. I want to permit you to place this calculator in your office and try it even though you fully intend in advance to send it back--even indeed if I receive nothing from you but a frank opinion of it and a return shipment at my expense.

Argument mingled with inducement

So I am making you this offer--an offer so fair and broad that even if you had made it yourself you could not have made the conditions fairer. It is no longer a question of whether the machine is really practical--for 5,000 concerns you know and respect have actually tried it out--and now stand behind it. It is no longer a question of whether or not you can afford it--for under the new offer, YOU PAY FOR THE MACHINE AS IT PAYS FOR ITSELF.

Argument and persuasion

Read the offer through and ask yourself if you could receive a fairer one. A quarter a day--the cost of a couple cigars--places the Crown in your office AT ONCE. The first payment of $5 enables you to put the machine into immediate money-saving money-making use. And the balance you have nearly a whole year to pay.

Clincher making ordering easy

I have attached a convenient coupon to the circular enclosed. Simply sign this coupon--enclose it in an envelope with a $5 bill and mail it to me--AT MY RISK. Your name is enough security for me. The Crown will go forward, all transportation charges fully prepaid, as fast as return express can take it.

Yours very truly,

A good letter, showing strong inducement presented in a naturally expressed, man-to-man talk that wins the reader's confidence.

ment which will definitely answer that cold, indifferent question, "Why should I?" And you answer it "You will gain." Or to the question "Why shouldn't I?" you will answer, "You will lose."

A book publisher does this effectively by giving exact figures on the number of copies of certain books that he is able to supply. *"In six weeks more,"* he writes, *"our contract with the author expires. Three times we have been forced to renew this contract; three times we have ceased all book advertising and still the orders have continued to pile in so heavily that another arrangement with Mr. * * * was imperative.*

"Of the 30,000 sets we have printed altogether there are now about 149 in the stock room, and 1,000 more are going through the bindery. If you had seen the orders streaming in at a 200-a-day clip at the termination of other contracts, you would realize how quickly these 1,149 sets will melt away. While we still have books on hand, I want them to go to our own old customers. I cannot, of course, discriminate against outsiders; I must fill the orders as they come in. But I can urge you to speak for your set now."

The common error in handling the inducement is generally that of attaching false or fictitious values to what is offered. One brilliant sales manager whose firm dealt in mine machinery and supplies won many customers by constant reference to a loose-leaf catalogue for which he issued new sheets and revised prices each week. The system was so thorough and the new sheets so valuable that many customers used it simply because it was easy to handle.

Another sales manager tried the same inducement, using a bound catalogue of huge dimensions. He failed. In both instances the catalogues were remarkable but

Dear Sir:

You have not yet sent us YOUR subscription to SYSTEM.

Why?

It cannot be the price--$2--for you would gladly give many times that amount for the ideas that a single issue of SYSTEM will bring.

It cannot be the want of time--for a mere stroke of the pen would place your name on SYSTEM'S mailing list.

It cannot be you are not interested--for who ever heard of a business man who did not want his business, his efficiency, his income to GROW?

It cannot be the need of opportunity--for we have written you five letters, giving you five opportunities, and as yet you have not responded to any one of them.

So we write once again. Will you give yourself a chance to learn what SYSTEM is accomplishing for you even while you are keeping it from your desk? We do not want to annoy you; we want to help you, and as evidence of our sincerity, make the following unusual offer.

YOUR choice of any ONE of the remarkable series of HOW books described in the enclosed folder!

Bear in mind: One book FREE with your renewal! And every idea in every volume is specific, practical, USABLE--written by experts. Here are correct, definite, detailed solutions for all those business problems that so long have vexed and worried you. Every book in the whole series is printed in large clear type on dull-finish book paper, richly bound in vellum de luxe, 128-172 pages, size 5 1/4" x 7 1/2"--worthy of a place on any business man's desk.

Run your finger down the nine titles listed in the circular. Pick out the book YOU need. Mark your choice and send with a $2 bill TODAY.

We will not only send you SYSTEM for the next twelve months, but will also forward you, absolutely free, even transportation charges prepaid, the "HOW" book that YOU choose. This is the fairest offer we know how to make. Take advantage of it NOW and thank us at your leisure.

Yours very truly,

An actual follow-up letter that has been very successful in pulling a large number of orders. Note how, without the slightest suggestion of apology, it condenses the arguments that have gone before, then offers an inducement as a climax not only of the letter, but of the entire series.

one was serviceable and the other clumsy—one constituted a real inducement and the other was a deterrent.

THE inducement feature of the sales letter must always stand before the most searching inquiry. To fool a customer into responding to your letter may mark you as exceptionally clever, but that customer will neither forgive nor forget if he finds it out.

For example:

A certain dictionary publisher sent broadcast an announcement stating that holders of his dictionaries who would send him the printer's imprint of the several volumes would doubtless learn something to their advantage. The bait took and those who responded by naming the imprint of the printer from whose press had issued the first edition, were immediately importuned to buy an appendix to bring the work up to date. It was a shrewd scheme—too shrewd. It may have sold books, but it as certainly made enemies for that house. I know because I was one of "the goats."

YET while such brazen means are to be eliminated there is a wide latitude within which the mail-salesman may work without being reduced to price slaughtering—other inducements which will pull replies from interested people and make the labor of landing the order easy. A case of this is seen in the following, written by the commercial agent of a large power company:

"Dear Sir:—Will you kindly supply us with information as per attached form? We are getting statistics covering the power situation in L——and would appreciate your cooperation."

The form enclosed was provided with spaces for very complete information regarding the addressee's power equipment and requirements, and placed in the commercial agent's hands exactly the facts he needed in order to make a complete and definite proposition. About 33 per cent of the letters sent out brought back the desired information. This, to be sure, is an exceptional case, but it represents the extreme to which that part of a sales-letter designated as "the inducement" may be carried.

It is not necessary to offer "something for nothing." It is not necessary to appear to be giving your man a double eagle for a one-cent postage stamp. But it is necessary ever and always, to incorporate in a sales letter something which will answer that eternal:

"Why should I?"

It may be simply an offer that is eminently fair and so squarely put up to you that you cannot refuse, as for instance when a refrigerator manufacturer writes: *"Remember, an order is simply an opportunity for the Morton to sell itself to you. There is no sale—no obligation to keep it—until you have used it in your home for 60 days and are satisfied. Just let us send it."*

And always make the inducement seem easy to take hold of. Have nothing involved—nothing that will force the reader to doubt as to the correct thing to do. Uncertainty is the mother of inaction. Your proposition should be clear as day—" Do *this* and you get *that*"—and no matter how indefinite you leave "that," you must make "this" specific and simple. This is the real strength of the coupon in advertisements and of order-cards in circular letters. Coupons and order-cards are not so much easier to use than a short letter, but they *look* easy and—what is more important—they condense the terms

and methods of procedure down to bare essentials and show the customer exactly what to do.

The process of making it look easy to take hold of the inducement, follows up the answer your inducement makes to the question, "Why should I?" with the insistent return question of "Why shouldn't you?"

The "Now" Element

FINE phrases and interesting anecdotes are not what bring replies to the sales letter. The prospect may enthuse over your literary touch and swear at the delay you have caused in his work. He may chuckle over your wit—and chuck your proposition into the waste.

The only thing that sometimes redeems stupid paragraphs—that makes clever wording irresistible—is a reason to act *at once*, a subtle demand that must be met *now*, a simple *why* that puts this particular, brief task above the dozens which clamor to be done today and must—some of them—await the tomorrows.

CHAPTER X

Summary and Climax—The Clincher

SUPPOSE a salesman came into your office with an article, demonstrated its qualities, proved your need of it and its value to you, made you want it so badly that you were just reaching into your pocket to pay for it—and then, when he could have your money for the asking, suppose he suddenly strapped up his sample case, said "I will be glad to talk to you more about this some other time," and walked out the door.

What kind of a salesman would you call him?

A shoe manufacturer tried to sell me a pair of shoes by mail. He wrote a letter that had me interested, convinced, almost ready to buy. Then instead of a clincher that decided me, I struck this last paragraph: *"We solicit further correspondence with you concerning our proposition."* What did I do? I shot that letter into the waste basket, and bought a pair of shoes on my way home.

Any difference between the absurdly imaginary salesman in the first paragraph and the very actual letter writer in the second? Not a bit.

But suppose the shoe manufacturer had closed by saying: *"Simply check the size and style you want on the enclosed blank, sign and mail it today with $3.00 in any*

convenient form and the shoes will come to you at once all charges paid.'' Suppose he had said that! The chances are a hundred to one he would have my money now and I would be wearing his shoes.

And there you have in a nutshell the vital essential that makes or kills a sales letter.

YOU are wasting time and energy when you concentrate your strength in your argument and then fail to turn desire into action. What is the use of making the prospect want your goods if you wind up your letter with a close that lets him feel he might as well wait a day or two? Let him wait and the chances are that next day your competitor comes along with a letter that strikes home. Then he gets the business and your letter slides from the hold-over file into the waste basket.

Make your prospect want to order, of course, but don't stop there. Make it *easy* for him to order and make him do it *now*. That is what is meant by real climax—it tells the prospect what to do and when to do it—it crystallizes all that goes before into the act itself.

Every successful climax has two parts. The first consists of what we have termed persuasion and inducement —it summarizes all the preceding strong points of the letter, it shows the gain that is mine in ordering, the loss that is mine by delay. It emphasizes return and minimizes cost. It is the paragraph that says: *''Just think what you are getting—this and this and this, all for the small sum of—, think what it means to you, to your future. And remember, you do not risk one penny. Every cent of your money will be returned to you if you are not satisfied. Why delay a single moment?''*

When he reads that, your man is *almost* ready to act. But not quite, for your climax lacks the clincher. What

is he to *do* to get all the things you offer? *Tell* him. Make it so plain and so easy that he will have not a reason in the world for *not* ordering. If you don't, you haven't finished your letter, and lacking the effect of that clincher your prospect is going to lapse from his "almost ready" attitude back into indifference.

NOW how can you get him to act? Go back to the star salesman. How does *he* do it? He gives you something to sign. He lays before you an order blank complete save only for your signature. Note how easy he has made it for you to order: he does not ask that you hunt up a letter head and draw up an order of your own. He has the order all printed and there within your easy reach.

Just apply his idea to your letter. Give the man something to sign. A post card filled out, addressed and ready to mail, a coupon that simply awaits his name—or some little easy-as-lifting-your-finger act to do that makes answering almost automatic.

There is something marvelous about the tempting power of the little blank that awaits your name when it is rightly employed. No man likes to be bull-dozed by another into signing anything. He balks when the tactless salesman literally shoves the order before him and attempts to force his signature. Force instantly finds the touch-button of his antagonism.

But watch the clever salesman who has learned the subtle influence of the waiting blank itself. He places the order before you but he lets it do its own tempting. He talks not the order but the goods, not your name, but your needs. And when you pick up your pen and sign your name you do so on your own initiative because you want the goods he sells.

Weak and too formal

Lacks interest

Apology injures and weakens appeal

Why should I?

More weakening apology

Dear Sir:

We have not had the pleasure of having received a reply to the letter we addressed to you about two weeks ago, and we pause to ask if you received that letter, as well as the catalog which we mailed you at the same time. If so, we trust that our prices and superior quality of Princeton Piano Player have so interested you as to insure your order when you are ready to purchase. If, however, the catalogue and letter did not reach you, kindly advise us, and we will mail duplicates.

We are real anxious to secure your order, yet do not want to annoy you continually with a lot of stereotyped letters such as are generally sent out by factories selling their products by mail--in other words we do not abruptly conclude that simply because you were kind enough to write us relative to our goods that you are under obligations to buy of us. We trust, however, that after you have gone over the matter very carefully you will decide that our Princeton Player is the best for the money, and that when you are ready to purchase, you will favor us with your order, as we know you will never have any cause to regret it.

In the meantime, if you have no objections, we will mail you now and then illustrations and descriptions of each of our new styles as we place them on the market, feeling that you will be interested in the latest up-to-date styles, even though you may not be in an immediate need of them yourself.

Again thanking you for the inquiry, we are

Very truly yours,

This is an actual letter used as the fourth and last in a follow-up series. It is poor because not only is it entirely lacking in argument as to quality or price, but throughout it takes entirely the wrong attitude—that of a continual apology for taking the prospect's time, for annoying him, for following him up at all. This invariably places the writer in a bad position, for instead of making the reader *want* to buy, it makes him feel that his order is asked merely as a personal favor.

Now note the rewritten follow-up letter on the same proposition. Without a suggestion of apology, it goes straight to the

Direct

Dear Mr. Carter:

The only thing that has kept you from ordering a Princeton Piano Player long before this is that
-- you are still a little in doubt as to its value
-- you still hesitate to believe that it offers positively the biggest value that your money can purchase.

Three condensed arguments convincingly stated

There are a number of ways in which we might once and for all time remove your prejudice, your doubts, your misgivings.
-- We might point to the 8,143 satisfied purchasers
-- we might show you the steady stream of orders that number more than half a thousand each month
- we might pull open drawer after drawer filled to bursting with unsolicited testimonials.

But we have a plan better by far than any of these.

Inducement

You are to try the Princeton Player in your own home for thirty days --one full month--AT OUR RISK.

Proof

Simply deposit the first small payment. The player will be delivered to your home, ready for your use. Then put it to a test as thorough--as severe--as you wish. If the player does not more than please and satisfy you in every particular, simply say so and we will remove it at our expense and refund every penny of your deposit.

If you are as thoroughly pleased as the 8,143 others who have purchased, you have simply to continue making your small monthly payments.

Persuasion

Could we possibly make a fairer, more liberal offer? Could any offer more clearly prove our absolute faith in the Princeton Player?

Strong close

Accept this offer today. Simply sign the enclosed deposit blank, enclose $10 and mail now and the player will come to you at once.

Very truly yours,

point with argument and proof, and then offers a still stronger inducement—a free trial of the player. Far from being apologetic, it is straightforward, strong, convincing.

Now the beauty of all this is that the clever salesman's methods fit perfectly into the scheme of paper salesmanship. Build up your interest, argument, persuasion and inducement and then, when you have your prospect convinced, almost ready to say "I will buy," do as the salesman does, make it easy for him to decide, literally lay a waiting order blank before him.

Refer him to your little business-getting supplement —the blank or card or coupon. Simply tell him what to do and what the result will be; say, "You do this and we will do that." And with perfect self-assurance that whatever move he makes will be of his own choice, your man will find ordering so easy that he can't resist, he will "sign and mail today."

NOTE for example, how simple an act one house makes ordering: *"Merely sign the last page of the booklet enclosed—pin a two dollar bill to it—and mail us today."* Elementary, isn't it? No writing a letter, no buying a draft. The homesteader on a stage route with the stub of a pencil and a two dollar note could answer that letter as well as an executive surrounded by a bevy of stenographers.

There are two essentials to a successful clincher of this kind: it must give the reader something easy to do, and it must be clear. Virtually your offer is a contract and its terms should be so simple, its conditions so eminently fair, that the reader can find no reason for *not* accepting it.

These people exemplify the idea perfectly when they say: *"Simply pin a $2.00 bill to this letter as a deposit, and we will send the book by the first mail. Look the book over carefully. If you don't see a dollar's worth in al-*

Statement of fact wins confidence

Explanation of need

Explanation and argument showing how need is met

Explanation of advantages

Explanation of quality

Proposition brought to definite point in close and clincher

Dear Mr. Graham:

You will of course, as a matter of convenience and economy, install stock racks in your new factory--racks that will classify your supplies and make them easily accessible.

But in addition to affording these advantages you will want racks that occupy no more space than your supplies actually demand. Every foot of space in your factory is a fixed expense to you, it costs you money every day year in and year out. And every foot of space that is wasted means actual money loss.

This one feature of compactness alone makes the Thompson steel rack superior to any other device in use for the storage of parts and supplies. For the Thompson is adjustable to every varying demand. You don't have to waste a large bin on two or three parts and stuff a small bin to overflowing. You can adjust each bin separately to the nature and quantity of the articles it contains, so that parts are given not an inch more room than they actually need. Think what this means in money gained every day in the year.

Yet as your supplies or stock increases you will find these racks capable of unlimited expansion. You can make additions and extensions at any point to meet increasing requirements. Each section is a unit and new sections fit perfectly with the old.

And Thompson racks are built to last. Constructed of the most durable steel, they are tested to hold the heaviest loads, no matter how unequally placed. Once installed, they will never cost you one cent of additional expense and they will last a life time.

Arrange NOW to make these racks one of the great conveniences of your plant. Fill out and mail today the enclosed post card--it will bring our representative to give you a complete estimate of your needs. This information puts you under no obligation to buy, and it is yours for the asking. Send the post card by return mail.

Very truly yours,

A good letter beginning with a statement with which the prospect agrees and leading him step by step to the buying point.

most every page, write a mere postal and we will return your $2.00.

"There are no restrictions, no conditions, no strings on this offer. It is open to every well rated business man who acts before the first edition of the book is exhausted. Pin your $2.00 to the letter and mail today."

Could anything be plainer? And could a man find one good sound reason for *not* accepting that offer? Here is another: *"Simply wrap your three dollars in this letter and mail it now—not after lunch, for things to be done after lunch are often not done at all. But now when this letter is before you, when you need merely wrap your check or the bills in it and mail to me at my risk. And then the orders may come and the goods may go, by the hundreds—but you will be sure of your set by immediate prepaid shipment."*

Of course there are variations unnumbered to such closes. A typewriter company uses the idea admirably when it says:

"The factory is working to the limit these days and we are behind on orders now. But we are going to hold the machine we have reserved for you a few days longer. After that we may have to use it to fill another order. Sign and send us the enclosed blank today and let us place the machine where it will be of real service to you. Remember it is covered by a guarantee that protects you against disappointment. If you don't like it, simply return it and back comes your money."

THE simpler the order to be signed the better. A coupon of a dozen words can often tell the whole story. If no money is to accompany the reply, an addressed post card bearing a printed request is best of

all. "Simply sign the enclosed card and drop it in the mail" borders on the extreme of easy ordering.

There is something about a guarantee blank, too, that coaxes the pen to its dotted line. A safety razor manufacturer who sold his goods on approval enclosed with his sales letter a legal looking return contract that read:

ABSOLUTE GUARANTEE

*"I deposit herewith $2.50 for which please send me absolutely without further cost your * * * Razor. It is understood that if I am not perfectly satisfied with my investment I will return the razor to you within ten days and you will refund my full $2.50 promptly and cheerfully, cancelling the order."*

Such a protective guarantee wins the confidence of the prospect, and this form got many a buyer because it showed him specifically that he could not lose.

A correspondence school found a winner, too, in a serially numbered coupon which it enclosed with a letter telling of a special offer to students. Each coupon read: *"This serial coupon will be accepted as $5.00 in cash payment toward the tuition for our regular $18, twelve-weeks' course in bookkeeping, if properly signed and mailed within seven days following receipt of this letter."*

But when you give your man something to sign, guard well against obscurity. It is human nature to search a wordy order blank for statements with double meaning.

THERE never was a proposition that didn't have possibilities of a sales climax and there never was a sales letter that didn't have a place for a clincher. If you can't give the reader something to sign, do the next easiest thing. Note, for example, the way the man

winds up who solicits my typewriter ribbons for re-inking:

"A trial will convince you, and the sooner you send them the more you'll save. Why not press the button and have them packed up and shipped right now?"

A good climax is the antithesis of procrastination. It gets the reader in motion. It tells him what to *do*. It makes him reach for his pen, sign, seal and stamp his order and hike for the mail box.

The clincher is the only kind of a close that makes a sales letter bring results. Give your man something to sign or at least give him something so easy to do that he can't help doing it. Tell him how and what to do and to do it *today*. Try it and you will find your sales letters picking up the shekels like a magnet.

The Present Task

PUT into every letter, every paragraph, your undivided and focused force. Concentrate your thought upon it, undiluted with the worries of the past, unaffected by anticipations.

Give each problem your best. Finish it—and then forget it.

Part III

HOW TO MAKE A LETTER TALK

The Man to Man Message

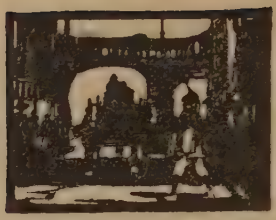
WRITING letters isn't reciting formulas nor conjuring with catchwords. It is *talking* on paper.

Anyone can follow the old precedents of correspondence. Anyone can load letters with the useless phrases and expressions of antiquity. Anyone can string together custom-bound courtesies and conventionalities.

But the man who jolts himself out of the rut, who puts things straight from the shoulder, who dares to be original—makes his letters pull.

Don't stick to moss grown usages of tradition. Be natural. Be alive.

Give your letter a man-to-man message to carry and watch the come-back in sales.



CHAPTER XI

News Value

THERE is one impression that you want your letter invariably to give—you want it to appear as a "to-day" product, a strictly live, up-to-the-minute communication from one man to another. And there is one way that you can give it this liveness better than any other—give it news value.

What the world wants and has wanted since the beginning is news. The business world is no exception. If you can tell a man something new, particularly something that has a relation to his business, you can get his attention and interest. Put the information into your letter, give it a sales twist and you can make of it a correspondence asset.

News as used in sales correspondence is of two kinds. You can take some live public topic—a good piece of newspaper news that you know must be familiar to the man addressed, and give it an application that will boost your own goods. That's one brand of sales letter news and it makes your paper talk bristle with up-to-dateness.

Or you can tell your prospect something that is primarily of interest to him and to you. Ordinarily such news is pretty close to your own proposition—it is news

that originates with you or with your trade, and it scores because when you approach a man tactfully about his business you touch a responsive chord.

The sources of news that you can use are limited only by the keenness of your eyesight and ingenuity. The first kind you will naturally draw mostly from daily and trade publications.

A WATCH manufacturer, for example, used the idea when he wrote something like this:

"One of the last things that Commodore Peary did before sailing on the expedition that found the Pole was to purchase a———watch. Could you imagine a stronger testimonial to the———as a perfect time keeper under all climatic conditions?"

There is news, human interest, and an abundance of proof in a reference like that. It makes the letter live primarily, but it carries more conviction as to quality than could volumes of argument.

News of this kind can be pressed into service by any man who sells his goods through letters. Here is the way a retailer with a clever turn of mind made use of a local disaster:

"Dear Mr. Henderson:

"No doubt you read in the Journal Monday that the dwelling house of Mrs. Findlay, on Front Street, was destroyed by fire. The fire was caused by the explosion of a gasoline stove which Mrs. Findlay was using in her work. In attempting to extinguish the flames Mrs. Findlay was badly burned on the face and hands. Everything she owned was destroyed and the loss will reach $2,000.00.

"We simply want to say this: that if Mrs. Findlay had had a gas range this would not have happened. A

gas range is safer, and much cheaper than gasoline. Now is the time to buy your wife a gas range and make her work a pleasure, and her life secure."

Accounts of injuries and deaths through accidents can be used to good advantage in accident and life insurance letters. Burglaries, particularly local ones, make strong appeals in letters from locksmiths, hardware dealers, burglary insurance men, bank and safe deposit men. News items regarding impure water can be made use of by the dealer in filters. There are a thousand opportunities for the retailer, or any other man to make his letters *live.*

Notice how cleverly this man who wants to sell me a course in mail order work makes use of a subject that is on the public mind:

"Congress will ultimately pass the Parcels Post bill and when it does more than five hundred firms will enter the Mail Order field within twenty-four hours. This statement was made recently by the editor of one of the leading newspapers in this country. When that day comes, and it is not far off, there will be in less than a week, more than a thousand positions open to men who have passed the examinations of this course. The mail order spirit is in the air—we can almost feel it. Are you the man to stand idly by and allow the opportunity to learn this business to pass without finding out what the mail order business has in store for you!"

ON THE other kind of news you will have to be your own reporter. After all, it is simply a matter of telling your man something about your goods that is of newsy interest to him. It may be a new model you are putting on the market, a new service you can give the dealer or the user. Again it may be simply advice as to

coming fashions or a suggestion as to the best method of handling certain goods. If it is given the news turn it gets the interest.

Here, for instance, is a newsy letter from a fork manufacturer to a retailer. It is good because it gives him an idea that he probably has not thought of before and best of all, it has practical value:

"Dear Mr. Dealer:

"When business is slow, and you have some time on your hands one of these warm days, wouldn't it pay you to telephone every coal dealer in your town, and try to get his order for coal and coke forks?

"Next season's supply of fuel will be largely delivered to residences during the remainder of the summer, and the haulers will need forks.

"Here is our heavy goods catalogue, showing all patterns and sizes. Please write us if your jobber cannot supply you with whatever you want."

For the retailer who uses the mails to keep in touch with his customers or for the manufacturer or wholesaler following up his trade, this is the kind of news that counts most. You need not go far to find it. Pick it out of your every day work or your trade paper. Every housewife *wants* to know what the store has new that she can use. She is glad when a Montana grocer writes her this:

"The first shipment of that delicious white plume celery arrived by express today from Kalamazoo, and although it came a long way, it is just as crisp and fresh as when it left the celery city. Just call up 72 and we'll send over as much as you want at ten cents a bunch."

Advance notices of coming styles are especially good news items for the lady customer, and if she gets them in a letter she will be far more impressed with the store

that writes her than she ever would through reading them in its newspaper advertising.

One store managed this matter very effectively by sending a list of names of lady customers to its Paris buyer and having style letters sent from there direct. The novelty of getting those personal letters from abroad combined with the actual news value brought results.

WHAT you consider just common things may be news to other people. For instance, here is the way a laundry man makes news out of his methods of doing work:

"*Dear Mr. Norton:*

"*You'll often find among your new laundered collars, some that are scratched or blistered on the seam. (That is, unless we do your laundry work.) It is not a necessary evil, either. The explanation is simple. The seams of a double-fold or wing point should be evenly dampened before folding. Otherwise it blisters or cracks. We have a machine to dampen those seams. It must dampen evenly, for it does it with mechanical precision. So you will get no cracked collars back from us.*

"*Just step to the telephone and call up Main 427, and your laundry will be ready for use whenever you want it.*"

And here is another letter that gets the idea, this from a bird fancier:

"*Dear Sir:*

"*We have just received a consignment of St. Andreasberg Roller Canaries which we can offer you at the special price of $3.50. These birds are really a second grade of Golden Opera Singer. During their course of training some birds make mistakes—others take up false*

notes. We call such birds St. Andreasberg Rollers. They sing just as often as the first grade birds and they all sing at night, but each bird has some slight imperfection in his song."

Now, personally, I have no possible use for a canary, but this man almost sold me a bird simply because, with what was news to me, he got me deeply interested.

Just keep this matter of news value in mind when you run through the letters that come to your desk tomorrow. Although you may never have stopped to analyze it before you will find that the man who tells you something new, the man that throws into his message some bit of live, up-to-now, information—that man gets your interest.

Put the idea to use yourself. You will find news making your dull dry correspondence sparkling with life. You will find it giving new pulling power to letters that have been going to the discard.

Human Interest

THE great result is only the fusion of many small perfections. But all the right elements of a good letter make only conglomerate, unless they be fused in the fire of universal living. They fall short, until they touch the common ground of your day's work and mine.

CHAPTER XII

Personality

YOU may have a proposition that shouts for itself, a proposition that is the best yet, but if your salesman has a colorless personality, you might as well shove the sample into the arms of a straw man for all the good such a pale individual will do.

And it is the same in the sales letter. If you expect to magnetize your prospect's money you must put a personal touch into your letters—not egotism, but your own honest, personal conviction, interwoven so thoroughly into your customer's personality that he feels you understand him and that he understands you.

This is the subtle effect of successful letter personality. It unties the wallet strings where the custom-made letter goes to the basket. It creates confidence where exaggeration and hot air breed distrust. It gets the business where the cold, serious, matter of fact communication falls on deaf ears. And this is true because the letter with a personality is "different." It stands out from its stereotyped companions like a strong man in a crowd.

Letters that really have a personality are order getters because of the two elements that are woven into them—the man-to-man attitude and originality of thought and expression. And these elements are found in every part

of the letter—salutation, body, close, signature and postscript.

IT SHOULD be remembered, however, in this matter of approach, that sales letters are distinctly of two kinds—the unsolicited letter and the reply to an inquiry. In the first you must announce yourself and win your own audience; in the second you come at the buyer's invitation.

Naturally the first situation demands certain preliminaries—winning the reader's attention and interest—before you can get down to a "hard-as-nails" business proposition. In the other instance you can slide over the prelude and talk your proposition from the getaway.

But even though you are approaching a man for the first time, there is no reason why you cannot take the man-to-man attitude. What you want is his interest and there is no surer way of getting it than talking to him about himself.

Look at your proposition from his point of view. Talk about the things he is interested in. Talk to him in his own words, his phrases. Express your ideas as he would. Make your letter a personal talk, full of life and action.

If you are trying to sell a man a pair of shoes, don't talk about *your* shoes until you have mentioned *his*. Take him to his own closet and drive home your shoe talk there.

Note how this letter addressed by a book publisher to bankers, strikes out with a vitally interesting statement in the most conversational kind of a way:

"Dear Mr. Brown:

"As soon as I learned the other day that your bank was making special efforts to secure more depositors this

winter, I had the manager of our printing department get the enclosed proof for you.

"It is really the most significant announcement that has been made to American bankers in years. And even though it is being printed in some of the big magazines, where you might see it, I am having this special proof sent to you direct so that no circumstance can deprive you of the opportunity it offers.

"For here is a chance to secure—in complete, worked-out form—the exact, practical plan you need to double or triple your business."

If you were a banker, would that letter get by you? It might, but I doubt it, for the moment you start to read that letter you must realize that someone is *talking* to you about a matter that is very important to you.

NOTICE, too, how a carriage manufacturer gets your attention from the start when he writes this way: *"Dear Mr. Smith:*

"I wonder how near your ideas and mine would agree in the selection of a buggy, and if a buggy that I would build for my own use would suit you. Every year I build a new buggy for myself—not because I wear out a buggy in one year's time, but because I am always able to sell my last year's carriage to a liveryman here for as much as it cost me.

"I built myself a new buggy this year, which was finished a little over two weeks ago, and I used it just one day when a particular friend of mine offered me $5.00 more for it than the regular price, and I let him have it.

"As this buggy took so well and everyone seemed to like it so much, I immediately arranged to get out a limited number of special jobs under the same specifications, and they are now nearing completion. One I am going

to use myself, and I am going to give you an opportunity to get one of the others.''

Thus the proposition goes swinging along naturally to a close so strong that I must answer the letter if I am in the market for a carriage at all. He compels me to feel his interest in the proposition, excites my attention and inspires a quick appreciation of what he has to sell, by talking to me as if I were in his office.

Of course, this man-to-man element of the letter must be qualified to suit the conditions of the prospect and the proposition. You wouldn't write to Bill Sikes, of Rising Sun, Nebraska, the same kind of a letter that you prepared for W. C. Chesterton of Boston. If Bill got W. C.'s letter, in which you spoke of his wife's elevation to the Colonial Dames, he would think you were ''kidding'' him. If W. C. got Bill's letter of coyotes and potato bugs, he would throw it in the waste basket with a shiver of literary disgust. Put in the heart-to-heart element, but in every case, be sure that it is right.

THE second element of the personality letter—unconventional expression—usually follows if the writer really establishes his man-to-man relationship. But there are certain divisions in the letter where positive effort must be made to tear away from a slavish following of custom.

Particularly is this true when an inquiry solicits your reply. Get right into your proposition from the start and, as you hope and strive to be natural, avoid the old formalities.

The average introduction with its ''We beg'' and ''Pursuant to your request'' is as useless as a third leg. Such expressions as ''Inclosed herewith'' take up the reader's time, detract from the main idea, and are abso-

My Dear Sir:

Use of worn out figure

Opportunity comes to a man's door only once. He must be prepared when it knocks at his door, and answer "ready," otherwise he is largely a failure; a drudge, trudging along daily on a mere pittance, awaiting the end, with no one but himself to blame. He did not grasp his opportunity.

Too general

Get out of the rut and into a field of greater knowledge, and thus be prepared to command, yea even insure a larger income. Business men are coming to recognize the value of a better knowledge of existing conditions, of organization and systematization. The factory expert may safely without fear of contradiction be said to be the Business Adviser of today. He assists in

Directness entirely lacking

the organizing of a business, and much if not the greater part of the success of the manufacturer must be attributed to the wisdom and grasp of the business foresight of the accountant.

No explanation or argument

But it is no longer necessary for you to depend upon an outsider for help in organizing and conducting your business. Here is your opportunity to become an expert yourself at a nominal cost. Fill out your order and get our book just published on "Factory Organization". This book has been completely rewritten giving you the latest and most up-to-date work extant.

Offer not clear

Our prospectus fully explains the scope of the work and qualifications of the writer. Any further information desired will be cheerfully given on request. This is your only opportunity

Weak close

to take advantage of a special offering. Will you grasp it? Act at once! Awaiting the courtesy of a reply, we are

Very truly yours,

Here is a letter that is full of generalities and so lacking in personality that it entirely misses the individual appeal. The proposition offered is not mentioned until the third paragraph and then in an incidental way.

Note how the same book proposition is handled in the rewritten letter opposite—a letter as personal as a call over the phone. In this second sheet, proverbs and axioms are displaced by reasons why the chance to buy is worth real cash to the particular reader every hour of his factory day. He is offered a particular proved opportunity, not general disserta-

Exact place and date

Mr. Page's Office,
Tuesday, January tenth.

My dear Mr. Colby:

Extremely personal opening wins confidence

This morning I received from our printers some news that I feel certain will be of interest to you. And because I do feel that this is a matter of unusual importance I am writing today to you and a few more of our warmest and oldest friends, so that I may hear from you and have the benefit of your opinion before any public announcement is made.

Explanation

I will receive from our printers Thursday a few advance copies of C. P. Watson's "Factory Organization"--a business book that I honestly believe will save you more REAL DOLLARS than any other book in print.

Reason for offer

We have issued no printed matter about "Factory Organization." But even a VOLUME of printed matter could not show you its value as will the book itself. So I want to send you the book. I do not expect you to BUY it blindly. I merely want you to look it over AT MY RISK and give me your frank opinion of it.

Argument

YOU WOULD WILLINGLY RISK A DOZEN TIMES $2.00 for a SINGLE plan that would reduce your factory costs ALONE. Yet this book contains 22 money saving plans that will reduce expenses throughout your whole business--plans of hiring and handling employes--plans that will check every leak and waste in your factory and office. And I do not ask you to RISK ONE SINGLE PENNY to secure them.

Persuasion and inducement

Merely send for the book on approval. The $2.00 you forward will not be regarded as a remittance but as a deposit. And then, if ANY SINGLE CHAPTER alone is not worth $5.00 CASH to you, I will not only send you my check for $2.00 but I will remit you in all $2.10 to pay you in addition for your postage and trouble in looking over the book.

Clincher

Merely pin a $2.00 bill to this letter--mail tonight if possible--and use the envelope enclosed.

Yours very truly,

tion. This contrast illustrates the possibilities of the use of the personal element.

lutely foolish. You might just as well attach stickers, saying inanely, "This is an envelope" and "This is a sheet of paper."

If you asked a salesman for prices on his best hurdy-gurdy or what-not, it isn't likely that he would clear his throat, hitch up his trousers and launch into a seventeenth century prelude. Not much. He would snap out something like this, and skirmish for a sale: "We have three styles of hurdy-gurdys, one at so much, another at this much," and so on. The salesman is interested in sales and so are you. Why not take a lesson of him, then, and chop off the hackneyed preface? What is the sense of obscuring the real issue by a lengthy prelude, useless apology, a request to write, or begging for permission to advise? Get down to brass tacks and catch your prospect's attention from the start.

Note how this manufacturer goes straight to the point in his opening:

"Dear Mr. Davis:

"Your goods may leave the factory in the best of condition. But how do they reach their destination? Any freight house is likely to be over-crowded any day, and open platforms and wharves piled high with freight. Your goods are not favored—they are just as likely to be left outside as any. And a sudden rain may absolutely ruin them.

"Why not insure your shipments against rain, snow, fog—against rust or warp or mildew. You can do it absolutely with Andrews' Waterproof Wrapping.

"Andrews' Waterproof is made of just three things: heavy tough paper, perfect water-proofing and reinforcing cloth, giving extra toughness and strength. No matter how awkward or irregular the shape of your product, sharp corners or projections will not poke through. And

your goods will reach their destination as dry and sound as when they left your shipping room.''

Like a good salesman, this writer launched into his subject without prelude or apology.

ORIGINALITY of thought and expression is really shown in the body of the letter more than in the salutation and close, for there the opportunities are almost limitless. For instance, observe the stilted style of this tiresome long drawn-out sentence:

''Our connections are such as to make it possible for you to place your order with us right here in the City, where we can show you the goods and demonstrate the efficiency of our cars, and we hope that just as soon as you receive the catalogue you will look it over carefully and make it a point to call at our sales room which is connected with our general offices, and give us an opportunity to show you what our cars will do.''

And then turn to the refreshing ease of expression in this from a local tailor:

''Do you know that Henry has been cutting clothes for some of Atlanta's best dressers for the last ten years and that many of our old customers run in from out of town just to get that perfection of fit that they know only Henry can give them? This is just an indication of the confidence particular dressers have in our ability to give clothes comfort and satisfaction.''

Here the writer has even referred to his cutter by *name*. The ordinary writer, if he mentioned the cutter at all, would have spoken of him simply as an employee.

BUT this is not all there is to a letter. A writer who has injected personality into his salutation and halfway through his letter to end in some such trite

phrase as, *"Hoping to hear from you by return mail, we are,"* is as bad as the correspondent who uses stereotyped expressions throughout. Both blunt their effect on the prospect.

The closing paragraph should force the prospect into action—not put him to sleep with such hackneyed expressions as "trusting we shall hear from you" and "begging to remain." Such conventional baggage only loads down a letter and means nothing. The prospect knows that you "hope" for his business and "trust" he will answer your letter.

If your communication demands a distinct close, say something new, typical of life, as, for instance:

"Sign and mail the order now, before it slips your mind."

"Just say the word and the samples are yours."

"Can you afford to overlook this when it means dollars to you?"

Millions of unread letters are tossed to the waste basket because they lack personality. From beginning to end they look alike. They "beg" this and "trust" that. It's "we do" and "You don't" until the reader is as bored as you are with your neighbor's one-record talking machine. Successful correspondents are learning that hackneyed salutations and strained complimentary closes are lost on the prospect, that it is, above all the man-to-man element—the office talk on paper that gets the orders.

RESOLUTION to buy is a whetted razor edge. Don't overstrop it; don't hit it with a brick. When it's prime *put it to work!*

CHAPTER XIII

The "You" Element

YOU would probably leap up in burning wrath if, tomorrow, you could see your sales letters kindling a hundred morning fires. At least you would want to know why your sales letters interest only the man who empties the waste basket. You might bring your correspondents to the carpet, you might quiz and you might threaten, but it is a ten-to-one shot that they couldn't answer when you were all through.

If you are to solve the most perplexing and yet obvious fault of your sales letters, you must sit down and pick apart your paper salesmen. As you analyze your correspondence you will be impressed with one fact—that there is too much "we" in the beginning of the sales missive. If you push your investigation into the body of your letters, underscoring each "we" as you come to it, you will find that the writer has literally peppered his story with the objectionable word. There is the answer to your question.

From beginning to end, the average letter consists of, "*We*" have "so and so" to offer; "*We*" contemplate this, and "*We*" intend to do that. But what do *I* care about what "*We*" do? How are *my* interests affected by a statement regarding "*ours*"? The closest thing to

you, is *"you."* The never ending source of attraction and concern to me, is *"me."*

And thus the correspondent kills a hearing because he begins talking about himself instead of "you." For example, a clothier writes me a letter: *"We are showing the most attractive line of spring and summer woolens in the city. The cut of every garment is the latest and up-to-the-minute in style."*

NOW that kind of a letter hasn't told me what I wanted to know. The fact that they are showing the woolens doesn't particularly interest me. They may have the most attractive line in the city. What I care about is, what is in this for me? How will it affect my bank roll?

But if they had written: *"Mr. Smith, you spend $15 more for a suit of clothes than you should. How can we prove it? By making you just as stylish and as wearable a suit for $35 as you have been paying $50 for. You will look better and feel better in the clothes, and at the same time you will be saving money."*

If they had said this—ah! that would have been a different matter. For here is a letter that gets as close to me as my own desk, that touches my pocketbook, my business heart.

Again, a manufacturer writes me today: *"We have perfected and are now prepared to supply our new, patent-lined, double-rimmed, rust-proof, excelsior gas burner—the peer of them all."* When I receive that letter how does it affect my cost of production? I hold no stock in the gas burner industry. He might as well announce the discovery of a new mud puddle on South Main Street so far as my interests are concerned.

But suppose he had said: *"See here, Mr. Gas Burner, you spend $2.50 a month more for gas light than you should, and yet in spite of this waste you are not getting the brilliant illumination you are paying for. I can cut your gas bills in two, give you better, clearer, brighter light, and save you $2.50 a month. And the whole outlay to you will be simply the price of our new gas burners."*

Suppose the writer had said that? It would have been somewhat different and I would have probably hurried to the mail box with a money order. Forget yourself and talk about the other man's profits, needs, desires. Look at your proposition from his point of view and he will readily see it from yours.

DON'T begin your letter and every other sentence with "We." You may be the ruling power in your own world, but your reader doesn't know it. To himself he is the king of his own little kingdom. He has so many things to think about, he isn't interested in what you are doing. And yet he is the man you must get close to if you expect to get any of his money. He is interested only when he is sure of getting some money himself. I at once became alive to the proposition when I received this letter:

"Mr. Retailer:

"Why is it that you—the retailer—are compelled to lose more good hard cash through bad debts than any other man in business?

"Every month you have to charge up to bad debts, scores of good fat accounts that dead-beats refuse to pay. Mrs. Jones puts you off; Mrs. Smith tells you to wait; and so it goes—season after season. You could almost

Formal—"our" stock

Dear Sir:

Accept our thanks for your favor just received. We are glad of this opportunity to forward you a catalogue showing the styles which we carry in our Stock Room ready for immediate use.

"Our" styles

Of course it is impossible to show all the styles which we make. The illustrations shown, simply represent some of the season's best sellers as selected by the leading retailers from our two hundred and fifty styles designed by our selling force.

"Our" oxfords

Our shoes are correct in every sense of the word. Our oxfords possess superior fitting qualities. They do not gap at the ankle; they fit close and do not slip at the heel; they are the coolest shoe for summer. We have them in Green, Red, Tan, Black and Patent.

"Our" guarantee

Our Guarantee is something that is of vital importance to you if you care to be assured of full value for your money spent.

"Our" catalogue

We can make for any style required if you fail to find illustrated in our catalogue just the shoe you desire at the present time. We will forward the shoes prepaid upon receipt of your order with price and will strive to serve you in a most satisfactory manner.

Yours very truly,

Nothing robs a letter of directness so much as a lack of the "you" element. Here is an actual letter which illustrates particularly well an absence of direct appeal because of this fault.

This man tries to sell a pair of shoes, not by talking about the prospect and his needs, but about himself and his product. Note the prevalence of "our" and "we" in every paragraph. Half the words are mere machinery of this antique variety, through which "we accept, are glad, make, strive," and so on. The real meat—the specific words that catch the eye—could be compressed into two short paragraphs.

Then note how the same proposition is handled in the rewritten letter. The dealer comes over to the customer's side, just as a clever salesman would, and turns in to help him "get a fit." "That's right," he says, "a poor fit is a real calamity. What you want is this and this and this—and right here is a stock of shoes among which you'll find those very things." So the entire letter shows an understanding of "your" shoe

"Your" shoe troubles

Dear Mr. Sheldon:

What is more uncomfortable and aggravating than an ill-fitting shoe?

"Your" wants

Make up your mind that for once in your life you will have a shoe that satisfies you to the smallest detail--a shoe that does not slip at the heel nor pinch at the toe, a shoe that will not wrinkle or run over at the side. Make up your mind that this time you will have a shoe that follows perfectly the lines of your foot, that from the very day you first put it on, feels cool and comfortable, and that will retain its trim and stylish appearance under the test of wear.

"Your" comfort assured

Dickson shoes combine the three features that you have been looking for so long--style, comfort and wearing quality. They observe so closely the little points that give ease and comfort, that no matter how particular you may be, there is a shoe somewhere in our stock that is literally built for your foot. And you will be surprised to find how long it will last. For Dickson shoes, whether of patent, gun metal or tan, are made of the very best stock that leather science can produce.

"Your" wants supplied

The catalogue you requested is going to you today under separate cover. I want particularly to call your attention to the new "Easy Last" style on page 37. This may be just what you were looking for. But it is only one of the 54 attractive styles you will find illustrated.

"Your' choice

Select the style and finish that you like best, then simply fill in on the order blank the number, size and width you want, and mail to us today. If there are any little peculiarities about your foot, tell us about them. With this information to guide us we will send you, all charges prepaid the very day that your order is received, a pair of shoes that will fit you perfectly.

"Your" opportunity grasped

Do not miss this opportunity to obtain real, genuine shoe comfort. Send your order at once--today.

Yours very truly,

troubles and "your" needs, and offers the shoe it exploits as an article that will bring "you" satisfaction.

start a new store with the money lost by local retailers through bad debts.

"Now suppose we could tell you how to stop this; suppose we could tell you of a simple collection scheme used by one retailer down in Illinois that enabled him to make thirty of his hardest and slowest customers pay up—penny for penny—the hundreds of dollars they owed him. Wouldn't you jump at the chance to get it?

"Now, then, in the book described by the circular enclosed, you can get this very collection system; the simplest, most successful collection system ever devised—a system that does not require the assistance of an expensive collector; a system that you alone can operate, and the only expense is the cost of two or three two-cent stamps."

That is the kind of a letter that jars money from my cash drawer. The guns of attractive argument and effective salesmanship are leveled directly at me. I must either get out of the way or stand and take the shot. I buy because "you and your collections" has been the attitude of the letter. If this concern had pointed their letter shot somewhere up in the air of foreign interests, there would have been no reason why I should budge an inch, and I wouldn't.

I AM not interested in your proposition until you have shown some interest in my affairs. And you can never make me believe that you are really interested in me by everlastingly harping on *we*.

A tire manufacturer answers my inquiry with this: *"We have your favor of the fourteenth stating that you are interested in our advertisement on Wonder Tires. We are enclosing our Wonder booklet which illustrates and describes our Wonder tread. We would be very*

glad to give you any further information and our best price. Trusting that you will insist on Wonder Tires, we are, yours very truly."

Now I *was* interested in the advertisement, but is there one single reason in that "we" spotted letter why I should continue to be interested, why I should "insist" on having Wonder Tires? What I wanted from that manufacturer was tire talk that applied to *me*. *His* interest in the deal was obvious. It was *mine* that was essential to a sale. And that letter killed what little I had.

Contrast it with this from a manufacturer who would sell me an engine: *"You know what a nuisance it is to set out to equip a boat and find that you haven't got this and you haven't got that. Before you finish, it has cost a quarter or a third more than you figured on.*

"Customers have often asked us: 'What does your equipment include? Why don't you make it complete?' That's just what we're going to do from now on—we are going to 'put in everything.' And what's more we're going to pay the freight."

That man is talking to *me*. He knows my boat troubles. He's talking to me in my own boat house, and I read on through his description and sales argument with an interest approaching fascination, because I feel from the first word that the writer of that letter understands my needs.

TO BE a successful writer you must talk about your customer and his affairs. See that you get the word "you" in the opening sentence of your next letter. For example:

"You can make a larger profit if you sell Duff's Molasses, than if you don't. Your customers want Duff's

Molasses and they are going to get it somewhere. You can make big profits by getting in line early," and so on.

The grocer is interested in this proposition because it offers to put money in his cash drawer. There is no more interesting proposition to him than that. When he reads this letter he must decide whether he will order and make good profits, or stand idly by while the other fellow gathers in the benefits.

And now when you have just about determined to inject some of the "you" element into your letters, cultivate the ability to get over on the buyer's side and look at your proposition through his eyes. A good salesman never mentions the selling end of his game, he emphasizes the buying point.

You may think it selfish, but I repeat that the nearest subject to me is *me*. The ace-high theme with you is *you*. It is a human trait—as infallible as a physical law.

Personal Good Will

THE machine-finished sale is passing. Buyers prefer to deal man to man. The successful dealer of the future must approach his sales, his letter writing problems, from the customer's side.

It is not enough to collect today's profits, for your competitor is collecting tomorrow's good will.

Part IV

HANDLING COLLECTIONS AND COMPLAINTS

Sell Satisfaction

SUCCESS in selling doesn't simply mean goods sold. It means customers satisfied.

It means bills paid outside of court, and complaints handled on square deal principles. It means treating a man *after* you sell him as well as you do before.

Irritating back talk and aggravating threats never got a good-will settlement nor brought back a disappointed customer; a "chip-on-the-shoulder" attitude drives trade away.

But courtesy, tact, open-minded fairness—disarm antagonism, melt opposition, bring back business.

Be fair. Aim to sell *satisfaction*, and your goods will sell themselves.

CHAPTER XIV

Collection Correspondence

IT is one thing to induce a man to take something that he wants; it is quite another to induce him to give up something that he wants. And therein you have the vital difference between the sales and the collection letter.

True, both letters are built largely upon the same elements of salesmanship. Just as in selling a man an article, you win his interest in it, prove its qualities, persuade him that he needs it and induce him to buy, so in selling a settlement of your account, you must interest him in a personal practice of the golden rule, prove the justice of your request or demand, persuade him that it is for his own good that he settle, and finally induce him to enclose the money he owes you and "mail today."

Furthermore, a collection letter has just as many possibilities as the sales letter for those supplementary qualities that make talk on paper distinctive—personality, the "you" element—those intimate touches that get next to a man when mere formalities do little more than irritate and spur antagonism.

Recognizing this, collection managers are coming more and more to see the element of danger in a too strict adherence to the use of form letters. In the handling of a great many small accounts they are of course, an

economic necessity, but in a commercial business, at least, the man who is worth selling the first time, and whose trade is worth retaining, is certainly worth individual attention in the settlement of his bills.

CLASSIFIED according to their manner of treatment, collection accounts fall pretty strictly into two divisions: ordinary commercial accounts and instalment accounts; and they should be considered separately.

Getting the right tone into commercial collection letters is largely a matter of getting the right viewpoint and the right perspective on what your customer's relation and his obligation to you really is.

It is a mistake, in the first place, to look upon a just debt as anything but the strictest business obligation or to intimate in the slightest degree that you do not expect the debtor to pay it promptly. The merest suggestion that you consider it as any other than a straightforward business proposition will be eagerly grasped by the debtor with intent to evade. Furthermore, it is a mistake to ask payment on any other ground than that it is justly due you in exchange for value received. Many correspondents make use of the argument that the firm is hard up.

"*We are going to be frank in telling you,*" wrote one wholesale house, "*that we need the money. You are only one of a large number of our customers who are back on their accounts and unless you remit at least a part of what you owe us, we may find ourselves in embarrassing circumstances.*"

The moment you write a man like that you let him know that you are in the same class that he is and you put a new excuse in his mouth that he may not have used

on you before. If you think it advisable to talk at all along this line, do it without losing your dignity.

ON the other hand it is equally important that you consider the debtor first of all as a customer, that his friendly patronage be retained if it is possible to do so and that he be granted any reasonable extensions in time that he may ask. A customer's trade is valuable to you until he has shown by a persistent ignoring of your requests for settlement that he cannot or does not intend to voluntarily pay his bills. Under those circumstances his business is not desirable to you in the future and you are perfectly justified in a more stern demand for settlement or in taking any legal steps that may seem necessary.

Steering a middle course between these two principles —a business-like consideration of the debt and endeavor to retain the customer's trade—the collection letter may be made as cordial and dignified a communication as any other kind of letter.

Ordinarily four letters gradually increasing in urgency are sufficient to determine any debtor's position. When more than this number are used your efforts are spread over too much surface—you run out of ammunition before you reach your climax.

A furniture house which had fears of hurting its customer's feelings with too sudden a request for cash, got up a series of eleven collection letters. These letters increased in urgency from the first till the sixth, then became timid again in the seventh and eighth and not until the eleventh did the process reach the legal stage. Now the trouble with this scheme was that once the customer caught on to the game, he never had any more fear

Mr. Albert G. Green,

Randolph, N. C.

Dear Mr. Green:

You have been so busy making your preparations for the holiday trade, that you have doubtless overlooked the fact that your account with us is somewhat overdue. You have settled your bills promptly in the past and we feel confident that this reminder will meet with an equally prompt remittance in this instance.

How is the Venetian Toilet Soap selling? Many of our customers are finding this one of the best money-makers they have handled, not only because of its real merit, but because of the extensive advertising campaign which the manufacturers are carrying on.

As you know, we can give you an unusually good profit on this soap and it should pay you well to push it during the holiday season. If you can use another gross of boxes we can ship them on the day ordered.

With best wishes for a good season,

Very truly yours,

Speer, Hammond & Co.

An example of a good first collection letter written by the correspondent of a commercial house to a customer who has fallen behind. Note how the selling talk introduced gives the letter a cordial, courteous tone that impresses the customer with his obligation and at the same time lays a basis for more business.

of those threatening fifth and sixth letters. He deliberately waited until the ninth or tenth had come and then paid his bill, sixty days' credit to the good.

THE first letter should be courteous in tone, calling the customer's attention to the fact that his account is somewhat overdue and requesting an early settlement. It is well to at least impress the customer with the fact that he has your confidence by mentioning that

the bill has probably escaped his attention. Then, as if you had forgotten that this were a collection letter at all, follow with some good selling talk, some intimate inquiry about the things that interest you both. In short, show your man that you think of him primarily as one of the firm's valued friends.

You will be surprised to find how a little supplementary talk of this kind will bring in the customer who really wants to be square. And you can well afford to be cordial, for at this stage his future business is still valuable to you.

From the average careless but honest delinquent, a letter like this will pull a partial, if not a full payment of the account. Throughout it radiates only the good will of the house and from the man who intends to settle without difficulty it is certain to appeal because of its evident fair play. There is a chance, too, that it will pull business as well.

THE customer's action in response to this letter will determine the whole nature of succeeding procedure. If he responds at all the chances are that a cordial personally dictated second letter will save the transaction any unpleasantness. Possibly without making settlement, he may order more goods. A Chicago silk house uses this situation as a lever and writes the customer in this manner:

"Thank you for the order for——which was received this morning. I was somewhat surprised, however, to find that your letter made no mention of settlement of your last account, regarding which I wrote you on the 10th. We appreciate the additional business you are giving us, but cannot very well allow the account to become any larger on our books. The goods you ordered are now being prepared for shipment, and they will go forward

immediately upon receipt of check covering the earlier account."

If no reply to a courteous first letter is forthcoming within a reasonable time, a second and more urgent letter should be sent. How severe this should be will depend upon the debtor's value to the house. If a customer of good reputation heretofore, he may still be brought around by your showing an intimate interest in a friendly adjustment of his relations, something after this manner:

"You know from our letter of ten days ago that your account with us is now considerably past our usual limit. I feel that our former pleasant relations deserve at least an answer explaining why this matter has not been settled.

"You have not sent us an order in over a month. Was there something wrong with the last shipment, or is there an error in our statement of your account? If there is any fault in our service you know that we consider it a favor to be told about it.

"I shall await your reply with interest."

If, however, your knowledge of the customer's previous actions leads you to believe that he is deliberately ignoring your request, it is better to omit the conciliatory element entirely and write a brief, insistent request somewhat after this style:

"You have not favored us with a response to our letter of ten days ago asking an early settlement of the enclosed account, which is now considerably over-due.

"Please give this your immediate attention."

BEYOND the second letter in either case sales talk is worse than wasted. Not only is the customer who fails to notice two such requests worthless for future business, but a drawn out letter robs the request of

urgency. The third in the series therefore should be strictly a collection letter and should crystallize matters by setting a definite date on which settlement must be made. Here is a good form, for instance:

"You have entirely ignored our two previous requests for payment of your overdue account. We are consequently compelled to believe that you are purposely neglecting settlement.

"We must now insist upon this account being paid by ———."

When no response is received from such a letter, a creditor is justified in taking any steps that may seem necessary to force payment. The next letter to the customer should be little more than a notification of this. There is no need of explaining why you are placing the account in the hands of an attorney; that should be evident on the face of it. Write a note short and imperative:

"We have made three requests for payment of the enclosed account. Each one you have ignored. The account is long past due, and yet you have not even given us a reason why you have delayed payment.

"We cannot carry this any longer and unless it is paid by———we shall without further notice, turn it over to our attorneys for collection."

MANY firms do not turn accounts over to an attorney until a collection agency has tried its methods on the debtor and failed. But if you do write a man that you will go to court, by all means, do it. In other words never put a threat into a collection letter that you do not intend to back up. Any debtor who doesn't make at least an effort to settle after three requests, should be handled without mincing matters.

COLLECTION letters on instalment accounts differ from commercial letters chiefly in that the purchase is a single transaction and there is frequently little probability of future business. For this reason the sales element is largely lacking. Reason for settlement must run on two points—the buyer's honor and his obligation to abide by his contract.

The prime aim is to prevent the debtor from getting behind in more than one instalment. When two remain unpaid, the account is doubly difficult to collect, and if three accumulate, some summary action or a "cash up" offer is almost absolutely necessary to make the account profitable.

Because instalment propositions are usually sold to all buyers on a uniform basis of payment, form letters may be used far more extensively than in commercial work. In fact, debtors and their degrees of indebtedness may be so classified that a series may be prepared which will meet almost every objection and apply to nearly every situation.

One collection man has divided his accounts into four classes—those on which only the first payment has been made, those on which several but less than half have been made, those on which more than half have been made and those on which only a very small amount is still outstanding. For each class he has prepared a series of five letters and they have been so carefully developed through experience with instalment buyers that they are in the vast majority of instances as well suited as personally dictated letters.

It is customary among houses doing an instalment business on a monthly basis not to begin a strictly collection series until a second copy of the monthly statement, marked "Second Notice" has failed to bring a response. If fifteen days pass after this second notice without a

reply, a first letter should be sent calling the debtor's attention to the fact that the account has probably been overlooked and requesting immediate attention. It is not a bad plan to point out in this letter in a courteous way the importance of keeping these instalments paid up promptly. One house follows its request with a paragraph something like this:

"Perhaps you have overlooked the fact that in signing this contract you agreed to send us a remittance regularly each month without fail, until your account has been paid in full. This, however, was the agreement and we have naturally planned on receiving the payments in this manner.

"We feel certain that for your own convenience you will find it most satisfactory to adhere to this plan, for if you allow two or more instalments to accrue and are compelled to send us the whole amount in one remittance, it may work hardship. We will appreciate it if you will settle the overdue payment at once and see that future instalments reach us promptly each month as they fall due."

If a courteous letter like this does not bring at least a reply as to why the payment has not been made within ten or fifteen days, a second letter considerably more urgent in tone should be sent.

BEYOND this stage, procedure should be guided by surrounding circumstances. The buyer who appears at least to be perfectly honest and reliable should be given the benefit of the doubt and another courteous letter should be sent. One house writes to people of good standing in this manner:

"We should dislike very much to believe that this delay is due to other than oversight because you were so favorably recommended to us by your bank. Still if a remit-

tance is not received within a very few days, we shall have no alternative."

When such a letter gets no action, there is only one alternative left open—to start procedure toward immediate collection of the whole amount that still remains due on the purchase.

There are two ways in which this may be approached. Either the customer may be given a "cash up" inducement, that is, a discount or some additional article free for an immediate settlement; or the account may be turned over to an agency or attorney. To cash up is always preferable, because it offers a chance to bring in the money at once and also to retain the good will of the buyer.

"I am going to make one more effort," writes one collector for a publishing house, *"to reach an amicable agreement with you. If you will send me at once a check covering the balance due on your account with us, I will send you at absolutely no expense to you and as evidence of my appreciation of your fulfilling your part of the contract without unpleasantness, a copy of Wood's "Commercial Law," a volume which every business man should have upon his desk. Only an exceptional combination of circumstances enables me to do this and we have only a few copies of the book available. If you wish to take advantage of this offer, you should let me hear from you at once. Simply enclose your check with this letter and mail today."*

If your delinquent accepts this offer, well and good. If he does not, your only open road is to go to court.

THERE are many instances of course, in which neither the "cash up" nor the court is feasible, because the amount remaining due is so small that it will not

warrant the cost of either. In such cases, clever, personal appeal may do the business. Supposing of course that the debt is a just one, there is still a chance to touch the man's sense of respect for the square deal.

Remember always that most men *want* to pay their debts, and do not consider any man dishonest until he has proven himself so. Do not resort to threats or severity until conditions absolutely demand them. The debtor who has been harried and aggravated by the ordinary "give me my money" letter will have a pleasant surprise if you first show him a personal understanding of his case. And your cordial willingness to be reasonable will get your money while the man who flies to early threats waits for his.

The Deceptive Aggregate

A DELINQUENT file of five hundred follow-ups—a Monday morning stack of two dozen complaints—makes up an aggregate of petty evasion—of unreasonable demands—that looms large to the desk man.

But the debtor—the complainant—never sees that aggregate. Sarcasm aimed at *it* will puzzle and anger *him.* His need, his shortage, his annoyance, are what occupy his mind.

The letter that pulls must take his view, talk from his side, show understanding of his trouble; and thus arouse his spirit of fairness.

CHAPTER XV

How to Answer Complaints

IF your customers are worth having, they are worth satisfying and if your goods are worth selling, it is worth your while to demonstrate that fact to your customers, even after they have bought your offerings and you have their money. No legitimate business transaction is really completed until the customer is satisfied with his purchase. A satisfied old customer often represents more potential business than a bookful of untried prospects. If you have given him a square deal, he never stops saying good things about your business; but if you have left him dissatisfied, he never stops driving it away.

And it is not such a hard matter to show a man that you have given him at least all you have agreed to give him, if you go about it in a courteous, tactful way. Most people have more than a spark of reasonableness in them and an ability to recognize a fair proposition when they see it. If they haven't, they haven't the possibilities of being good customers and no concession, however generous, would ever satisfy them.

Good answers to complaints, like good collection letters, are largely a matter of attitude. There is no use assuming a high and mighty position and trying to make all your customers conform to your ideas of what a square

deal is. It is better to assume a fair but open minded position and then show each complainant that he really sees things as you do after all.

Neither is there anything to be gained by allowing yourself to become aroused over anything that a man with a kick may write you. For back talk simply aggravates the customer instead of pacifying him and leaves the grievance farther from settlement than it was before. And what is more you ought not to give the unreasonable kicker the satisfaction of knowing that he has stirred your temper.

ONE thing, do not be too suspicious of every complaint that comes over your desk. Remember that when the customer wrote his letter, he believed he had cause for doing so, and that the chances are he did have. Remember that *most* people want to be square with you, that *most* people are honest, and that by far the greater share of the complaints you get have a real cause at bottom. The fault may not be yours, but that is no reason why you should snap up a man for telling you about it. If you are not to blame, the proper thing to do is to find out where the trouble lies, and help the customer to straighten out the difficulty.

And even though a man seems to have no cause for complaint, be just as good natured about showing him where he is wrong as you would if he had a real grievance against you. Everyone else feels about the same as you do when you get a complaint that appears unjust and unwarranted. Your first impatience prompts you to say to yourself: "Oh, I'll show this fellow. I'll let him know that he can't talk that way to me. I'll write him a letter that he won't forget in a month."

And suppose you do. He gets the letter, reads it, lays you out good and plenty to everyone within hearing distance and fires back your goods. And the remotest chance of ever making a good customer out of him is gone.

But suppose you say to yourself when you get a letter like that: "Now, if this man knew as much about business as I do he wouldn't make a complaint like this. He writes this way either because he's ignorant of propriety and business courtesy or because he doesn't realize that mistakes will happen in the best regulated businesses. So I'll write him a letter that will wake him up, maybe, to what a business transaction really is. And I'll do it by giving him an example of cordial business courtesy." Then just carry out that idea, and you'll not only feel better about it yourself, but the chances are your attitude will bring back a customer who was ready to slip away at the slightest further provocation.

ALL genuine complaints can pretty nearly be traced down to two sources: real grievances and misunderstandings, the latter often due to ignorance of business methods or requirements. In either case it is up to you to settle the complaint satisfactorily and retain the good will of the customer.

And to do this, there are certain points that you must invariably consider. In the first place, answer promptly. An immediate reply goes a long way toward impressing a man with your sincere desire to see him satisfied. If he isn't specific enough in his complaint to enable you to answer fully, write at once for further information. If it is going to take you several days to investigate, write him first and tell him what you are doing. Every day that a complaint hangs over it becomes increasingly hard to

handle, while quick attention will preclude many possibilities of future unpleasantness.

Second, take the complaint seriously. For instance, if a man orders twenty reams of paper from you and on receipt of it writes that it is not like the sample he ordered from, don't say: *"Dear Sir: Your eyesight must be going back on you. The paper you ordered is certainly identically the same stock as the sample you named. Take it to the window and look again."*

If you do that you not only insult his intelligence but you may be getting yourself in bad for there's just a chance that a mistake was made in the stock or shipping room and that the customer is right.

Better write him something like this:

"Dear Mr. Blake: We are surprised to learn that the Golden bond does not seem to match exactly the sample from which you ordered. Could you by any chance have gotten this confused with Gordon bond which is right next to it in the sample book? These two lines are very similar in finish and the fact that there is also a similarity in the names has given rise to errors of this kind once or twice before. I wish you would refer to the book and see whether this might be the cause of the discrepancy.

"If it is not and you will send us a sample of the order you received, we will have the trouble looked up here immediately. We are always very careful to check over outgoing stock and see that it is just what is ordered, but we realize that an error might have been made somewhere in the process of packing and shipping and we will be more than glad to correct it." See the difference? That not only protects you but it shows the man your serious interest in putting matters right.

THE next vitally important point is that you take the customer's viewpoint. Look at the trouble through his eyes. Just as in a sales letter you can win a prospect's confidence by opening with a statement that he recognizes as a matter of fact and then from that point gradually leading him to your proposition, so in answering a complaint, you can start out by agreeing with him and gradually lead him around to your way of looking at the question. If you don't—if you state your position first and try to drag him to it, you are sure to antagonize.

A publisher sold a business book to a clerk in a railway office and the young man on receiving it complained that while the volume might be all right for a man in an established business, it was of no practical value to him.

Now the publisher might have answered that young man after this fashion:

"Dear Sir: Don't think that because the book seems of no use to you, we are going to take it back and refund your money. You certainly understood the nature of this book before you ordered it and if you didn't want it, that was the time to say so instead of now after we have gone to the expense of sending it to you and after the deal is closed. Under the circumstances, we cannot take the book back."

Understand that's what he *might* have said because that's just the tone in which many a complaint is answered every day. But he actually wrote the young man in this manner:

"Dear Mr. Gimbel:

I believe I understand perfectly just how you feel about the book. You feel that because your position is a detail one, because your work is limited in its scope, the book is too comprehensive to help you very much just now. And that would seem, at first thought, a very just

Century Tailoring Company,
Indianapolis, Ind.

Gentlemen:

The suit which you just sent us for Mr. E. F. Dickinson has arrived in bad condition. The lower part of one trouser leg is badly scorched. This was undoubtedly done by the man who finished and pressed the suit.

It is impossible for us to alter or remedy this in any way, so we are returning the trousers to you by today's express and would ask that you immediately replace them, as Mr. Dickinson is an old and valued customer and this delay is seriously inconveniencing him.

Very truly yours,
Henry T. Bridges.

Dear Sir:

We have your letter of the 25th and have carefully examined the trousers which you have returned.

After examination we can confidently say that it is impossible for the trousers to have been damaged in the way you suggest. We employ electric irons for all our pressing and they are scientifically heated so that they never reach a temperature hot enough to scorch the surface of the most delicate material. The iron may even be left in one position for a long time without scorching the cloth in the slightest degree.

The trousers were undoubtedly damaged in the shop of your local tailor where you sent them to be pressed, as it is a comparatively easy matter to scorch a fabric with the old fashioned tailor's goose.

While we feel that we are in no way responsible, we have nevertheless decided to replace the trousers with a new pair. These will be shipped to you Thursday.

Trusting that they arrive without delay and promising you that this will not happen again, we are

Yours very truly,

These three letters are an excellent example of how trade may be lost through untactful handling of a complaint and how it may be saved when skill and care are used. The first

Dear Mr. Bridges:

It seems that those very orders on which we are most anxious to please are the ones on which the annoying little accidents occur.

We were keenly desirous of giving Mr. Dickinson a suit he would feel proud of. He has not only been a good and valued customer of yours, but think of the suits he has ordered through you from us.

We are totally at a loss to understand how this accident could have happened. But why try to explain it? The time we would spend investigating, we have spent in rushing through the pair of trousers to replace the pair you returned.

We will get these to you by express Wednesday. Please apologize to Mr. Dickinson for us and make the apology as sincere as we would were we on the ground. In closing we can only assure you that we will be doubly careful in the future.

Very truly yours,

letter was sent by a local agent for "made-to-order" clothes to the house he represented. It was to his mind at least, a just complaint. But observe how a correspondent at the house answered it.

By arguing with the man, and attempting to show him how impossible it was for such an accident to occur in the firm's shop, he virtually accuses the dealer of covering a blunder of his own. Then following all this, though still protesting the firm's non-responsibility, he admits that they are complying with the request and sending a new pair of trousers. And even more unpardonable, he says in the closing paragraph "promising that this will not occur again," which practically admits the fault to be the firm's after all. Is it any wonder that the dealer, who had long been a good and profitable customer, decided at once to place another firm's sample book on his counter?

But suppose the complaint had been answered in the manner suggested in the third letter. Here the writer immediately concedes the justice of the man's complaint, expresses sincere regret and without the suggestion of protestation or argument, shows a cooperative spirit by rushing the new trousers to him. Even though the house may not have been at fault, it recognizes here the value of the dealer's and the customer's patronage and friendship. Such a letter would doubtless have meant many a dollar to the firm.

objection. But in reality, because your work is limited now, and because the book is comprehensive, aren't you that very man the book will help most?

"Every man wants to get out of the rut, to grow, to develop into something better. Yet who is the man who wins promotion? Is it the clerk whose work is limited to his own routine of details? No, it is the man who knows not only his own work, but that of the man above him. And that is just what this book will enable you to learn. For it gives you the experiences of the most successful men in the country, it describes in detail their methods and the results."

And so it ran on, showing the customer exactly how he could put the book to profitable use.

Now in reply to either of those letters the young man would have kept the book; but in the first instance he would have kept it because he had to, in the second he did keep it because he *wanted* to. And that is the difference between the effect of a poor complaint letter and a good one.

ANOTHER vitally important point—do not argue with anybody. If the customer is in the wrong, show him courteously where he is wrong, but *explain*, do not argue. If a customer writes you that goods he ordered of you to be sent by express two weeks before, have not been received and that he doubts whether you ever sent them, don't reply by saying: *"If the goods you ordered have not reached you, it is certainly due to no fault of ours. We sent them promptly and hold the express receipt to prove it. You should know that goods are often lost by the express companies even though the greatest care is shown in preparing them for shipment. Under the circumstances, we think you are hardly warranted in*

accusing us of not having sent them. When we say a thing you may depend upon it. If you doubt our responsibility or standing, you may write to the First National Bank of this city or look us up in Dun's or Bradstreet's.

"However, inasmuch as you say you did not get the goods, we are duplicating the order and would ask you to notify us if the first order shows up."

This letter, which is typical of many that go through the mails every day, illustrates not only the bad policy of arguing with your man, but also the mistake of first antagonizing him and giving him "insulted injury" back talk and then in the end granting him what he asks.

If you are going to concede the justice of his complaint at all or if you are going to grant him his claim simply as a favor, do it cheerfully and make the customer realize that you *are* giving him more than what is justly coming to him.

Write to this man whose goods have not reached him, something in this style:

"Dear Mr. Chapman: You are certainly justified in complaining over not having received the goods you ordered by express fully two weeks ago. You have been very considerate in waiting so long, and we appreciate fully how you feel about the matter now.

"It seems to us that there can be no question that the fault lies with the express company. The express receipt we hold shows that the goods were received by them in good condition the very day your order reached us. We knew you were in urgent need of this stock and we made a special request for quick service in selecting and packing it.

"As your experience has probably shown you, many concerns hold that their responsibility ceases the moment

the goods are turned over to the express company. However, we always consider the interests of our customer as more important than a technical privilege of this kind and we never consider a transaction closed until the goods are received and found to be entirely satisfactory.

"So we are having a duplicate shipment packed and forwarded to you today. We are confident that these goods will reach you almost as soon as this letter, and in perfect condition.

"The matter of delay in the previous shipment we shall take up with the express company at once and shall have them trace the goods. In the meantime, should they chance to reach you we will thank you to return them to us, charges collect."

There you have an answer that not only satisfies the customer in every point, but it is bound to make him realize that you are more than fair, and the incidental talk about your service gives the letter a little sales value that the customer isn't likely to forget.

POSSIBLY the best way to get the right attitude in answering a complaint is to stop and consider how you would handle the customer if he came personally into your office. Certainly you wouldn't pick a quarrel with him, you wouldn't let yourself be other than courteous and polite throughout his call. And you would take him all through the house if necessary just to demonstrate how sincerely desirous the firm is of giving him a square deal.

Remember that the next time you answer a complaint. Picture the customer beside your desk. Then *talk* to him. You'll find your old time itch to be vindictive gradually disappearing and the results vastly more satisfactory to you and the customer alike.